

INSECURE WORLDS ON SCREENS: EARLY ETHNOGRAPHIC CINEMA IN  
FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES, 1896-1931

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Early ethnographic cinema is a doubly condemned genre. These films emerged in a moment of cinematic history that scholars have had to vigorously defend against accusations of incompetence and archival excess. They were also born of the nineteenth-century cultural fascination with racial difference and the ever-expanding reach of Western imperialism. Post-war visual anthropologists distance themselves from their pre-war counterparts, arguing that early ethnographic cinema lacks not only technical sophistication, but also a necessary dose of self-reflection. For film scholars, the very term “early ethnographic cinema” has become a kind of shorthand for a regime of visual oppression and capture.

This dissertation examines the broad field of French and American ethnographic cinema produced by government agencies, academic institutions, and commercial film companies between the advent of cinema and the early nineteen thirties. Looking beyond and well before the most widely-cited example of this cinematic mode—Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922)—I reconsider the boundaries of early ethnographic cinema and challenge its pervasive dismissal as a hegemonic ideological and narrative force. Through close readings of the Lumières’ *Village Ashantis* series, the Albert Kahn photo-film archives, and a wide range of expedition films, I argue that early ethnographic cinema renders visible the discursive and disciplinary instabilities of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographic practice. Early ethnographic cinema demands a shift from linguistic signs to indexical images, from the armchair to the field, from the pen to the camera. It contributes yet

another order of displacement to a discipline founded upon geographic dislocations and decenterings. The incoherent or unstable quality of the ethnographic image owes not to the failures of untrained filmmakers or the primitivity of the earliest cinematic forms, but to the combined demands of ethnographic practice and visual reproduction. Cameras in hand, filmmakers went in search of the non-self, the unfamiliar, and the faraway. An insecure world of irrepressible motion and infinite difference stretched out before their lenses.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katherine Ellen Groo was born and raised in Longwood, Florida. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Comparative Literature from Emory University in 2002. She received her Master of Arts degree in Comparative Literature from Cornell University in 2007. Her research interests include nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographic practice; early cinema; non-fiction film; and experimental visual art movements.

For Nathaniel

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INTRODUCTION  
WHEN AND WHAT IS EARLY ETHNOGRAPHIC CINEMA?

“To find significance elsewhere in the history of the cinema, for example, in geography, in the concept and practice of the archive, the museum, the encyclopaedia, in travel literature, in painting, in ethnography, in banking and colonialism, is to expand the boundaries of the cinema. By opening up the subject of geography to the cinema perhaps another lock might turn and the study of the cinema thereby opened up to the entry of unaccustomed discourses, not least that of a wider history.”  
Sam Rohdie, Royal Geography Society Lecture

“The story then takes so curious a turn that I am amazed no novelist or scenario writer has seized upon it. What a film it would make!”  
Claude Lévi Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*

Of all the unsettling visions that mark Luis Buñuel’s ethnographic portrait of the Hurdanos people and their isolated region in Spain, *Las Hurdes* (1932), one scene garners the extended attention of nearly every critic who has responded to the film.<sup>1</sup> It begins with an announcement from an uninflected narrative voice: “In a deserted street we come across this child. Our guide tells us that she has been lying there for three days, but no one seems to know what her ailment is.” The sick child registers as an absence, her presence delayed by images of a desolate village. A few seconds pass and the film finally cuts to a close-up of a young girl staring directly into the camera, her presence replacing and correcting the previous emptiness of the street. The narrator continues, “One of our companions examines her,” and a man enters the frame. With this entrance, the film shifts from an indecipherable timelessness—the deserted streets of the Hurdes Altas region, the disembodied and anonymous narrative voice, the cyclical purgatory of the Hurdanos’ lives—to a past moment of presence. The camera was there and a man stood beside the sick girl. The proximity of this encounter intensifies as the film cuts to an extreme close-up of the girl’s face, her mouth open for inspection. The spectator must not only meet the child’s gaze, but also

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<sup>1</sup> There are two English language versions of the film, *Land Without Bread* and *Unpromised Land*. A French and Spanish version, entitled *Terre sans pain* and *Tierra sin pain*, also exist. There are small distinctions between these different versions of the film. For the sake of clarity, I am limiting my discussion of the film to *Las Hurdes: Land Without Bread*.



inspect her teeth and throat. The narrator adds, “The child’s throat and tonsils are terribly inflamed, but unfortunately we could do nothing about it.” The spectator, too, can do nothing about it, save fruitlessly search for signs of the inflammation. The film cuts yet again, this time to an empty frame. The narrator explains, “two days later, they told us that the child had died.” In this cut, from the girl’s open mouth to the empty frame, two days have passed and the child is gone. The scene concludes with a final, disorienting shift. The narrator juxtaposes the image of the girl’s throat and the knowledge of her death with the following question: “What do the inhabitants of this barren country eat?” And so begins the next sequence of the film: an equally uninflected meditation on the dietary patterns of the Hurdanos.

The dying child sequence exemplifies the narrative and visual instabilities that constitute the unique texture of *Las Hurdes*. For scholars of ethnographic and non-fiction film, these instabilities mark an experiment, an overturning, and a radical critique of visual ethnography. Vivian Sobchack grounds her reading of the film in the unreliability of the narrator.<sup>2</sup> The film’s omnipresent voice fails to describe the image accurately, often arriving too early or too late, or describing aspects of the image that never arrive at all (e.g. the death of the child). The narrator both delivers the kind of information that one expects from an ethnographic film and subversively plays with the convention of narrative knowledge. For Sobchack, *Las Hurdes* forces us to “reject the narrator for he, as well as the Hurdanos, are alien: trapped in their lives, in their respective cultures, in their vision of the world.”<sup>3</sup> In this way, she argues, “*Las Hurdes* is deeply political (rather than merely partisan) in that its primary aim is to cause the viewer to question the very bases of perception itself.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes*,” *Documenting the Documentary*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Tom Conley describes *Las Hurdes* as the first cinematic example of “documentary surrealism.”<sup>5</sup> He reads the antagonism within and between images, noting that the film contains a total of 238 shots in twenty-seven minutes. Conley argues that the “sheer number [of shots] would lead a viewer to believe that the film is inspired by Eisensteinian montage instead of poetic realism. cursory viewing proves otherwise, since the impression is one of redundancy, inertia, and unchanging, unmediated portraits of life on the verge of death.”<sup>6</sup> The film insists upon visibility, movement, and continuity that forever fail to materialize. According to Conley, *Las Hurdes* incorporates the trappings of realist documentary and ethnographic cinema—their shared traditions of montage, deep-focus photography, seamless voice-over narration, dissolve, and classical framing—only to combine them in unfamiliar ways and undermine the realist ends that they are usually made to serve. Conley thus categorizes surrealism as a kind of visual subterfuge, as a thwarting of realist expectations. More simply put: surrealism undoes realism.

Catherine Russell also claims *Las Hurdes* for the surrealist movement.<sup>7</sup> However, she understands the film’s “shocking transgressions of the humanist mode of colonialist ethnography” as an extension of the anti-humanist and anti-bourgeois strand of surrealist production, embodied by Georges Bataille.<sup>8</sup> For Bataille, transgression potentially releases the individual from the rigid architecture of the

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Conley, “Documentary Surrealism: On Land without Bread,” *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996): 176.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Buñuel was a signatory of André Breton’s second *Manifeste du Surréalisme*. Nevertheless, Buñuel’s relationship to Bretonian surrealism remains unclear. The second manifesto was published in the wake of a massive defection from Breton’s camp and reads as a missive against those who abandoned the project, rather than a coherent mission statement. Moreover, *Las Hurdes* evokes Bataille’s aesthetic and artistic aims more clearly than those of his surrealist counterpart. James Lastra makes a compelling argument in this direction. See Lastra, ““Why is this absurd picture here?”: Ethnology / Heterology / Buñuel,” *October* 88 (Summer 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999): 27.

body, from identity, and from the ideological prisons of logic, reason, and science.<sup>9</sup> He insists upon artistic practices that both challenge the architectural enclosures of human subjectivity and resist the confines of the written page, the frame of a painting, or the museum. Bataille pulls everything downward, to the ground, to the forgotten big toe. Bodies become fragmented and formless (*informe*), words signify in multiple and contradictory ways. Equilibrium extends across these disparate parts, all equally covered in mud. As Russell explains, *Las Hurdes* arranges its visual and auditory materials as a refusal “to accommodate the Hurdanos into any aesthetic or ideological system of thought. The film’s materialism consists of a rejection of humanist models and a reduction of cinematic representation to a collision of competing discursive voices.”<sup>10</sup> Following Bataille, the text cannot be recuperated or made whole. Its images do not cohere in any way, to any system.

These critical works make separate claims about Buñuel’s strange film. They address different visual and auditory patterns and come to distinct conclusions about what *Las Hurdes* might mean for a future tradition of experimental ethnographic filmmaking. However, they share in the very same point of departure. *Las Hurdes* overturns, resists, and defies. It marks a break with film history, initiating a new wave, a moment after, or a “post.” Sobchack argues that the film’s point-of-view “shatters the complacency of prevailing tradition.”<sup>11</sup> Conley uncovers a world gone awry, a challenge to realism and coherent expression. Russell equates humanist ideology with early ethnography; in refusing the former, *Las Hurdes* refuses the latter.<sup>12</sup> Each of these critical voices indirectly posits a coherent tradition of non-

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<sup>9</sup> See Denis Hollier, *La Prise de la Concorde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Sobchack, “Synthetic Vision,” *Documenting the Documentary*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Although Russell acknowledges that the film “refers back to thirty years of protodocumentary filmmaking,” she never discusses the actual content of these first thirty years or its relationship to a film like *Las Hurdes*. Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 28.

fiction ethnographic cinema, which gathers strength and solidifies in the decades that precede the film's production. And yet, apart from a few passing references to Robert Flaherty's work of docu-fiction, *Nanook of the North* (1922), none of these scholars explores the ethnographic canon upon which their arguments depend.<sup>13</sup> But one can hardly blame them for the oversight. Their work is not about film history *per se*, nor do they intend to debate whether *Las Hurdes* changes the landscape of ethnographic cinema. Rather, they take this much to be true, decided, and certain. They build upon a line that has already been drawn, a foundation in film studies that scholars perceive to be firm, and a discourse about early ethnographic cinema that has become far more canonical than the films themselves. These analyses rearticulate prevailing film histories and theories that neatly separate early ethnographic cinema from the experimental or the avant-garde. Indeed, it is not a matter of *whether* a film like *Las Hurdes* qualifies as a work of experimental ethnography, but *what kind* of visual experiment it conducts.

In reading *Las Hurdes* as a reversal of ethnographic convention, scholars posit a stable collection of images, practices, and ideologies where few exist.<sup>14</sup> The neat

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<sup>13</sup> Conley notes the similarity between Flaherty and Buñuel's camerawork and tellingly vacillates between the terms "documentary," "realist documentary," "anthropology," and "ethnography" in an effort to name the particular text that *Las Hurdes* addresses and undoes. In Russell's reading of *Las Hurdes*, *Nanook of the North* is the only cinematic precursor she mentions. In the most succinct articulation of the historical and critical link commonly forged between the two films, P. Adams Sitney's brief description of *Las Hurdes* in *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers* claims, "Less sophisticated viewers miss the parody, the film ends with a spoof on the most famous of [...] documentaries, Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* [...]. Along the way, there are hilarious clues for the observant viewer, which are generally overlooked; Buñuel realized that audiences respond to the preconceptions of a genre more thoroughly than they do the details before them," (202-203). Both Ken Kelman and Jeffrey Ruoff endorse this ethnographic genealogy. See P. Adams Sitney, "Las Hurdes," *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers*, ed. Christopher Lyon (New York: Pedigree Books, 1985): 202-203; Ken Kelman, "Las Hurdes," *The Essential Cinema*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1978), 122-126; Jeffrey Ruoff, "An Ethnographic Surrealist Film: Luis Buñuel's *Land Without Bread*," *Visual Anthropology Review* 14, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1998): 46.

<sup>14</sup> E. Rubinstein's reading of the film, "Visit to a Familiar Planet: Buñuel among the Hurdanos," presents a wonderful exception to this critical phenomenon. In response to the question, "What kind of documentary is it?" Rubinstein responds, "It is a travelogue," (7). He continues, "more *precisely*, a parody travelogue: the nearly unendurable ferocity of its images operates in ironic disjunction with the cheerful desire to widen the viewer's horizons and the sheer mindless colonialism implicit in the

division between convention and experimentation, coherence and illegibility, *pre* and *post*, relies upon incomplete histories, limited archives, and entrenched mythologies of both early cinema and ethnographic practice. A careful reading of early visual ethnography generates an altogether different historical and aesthetic framework for Buñuel's ethnographic documentary. Rather than a refusal or a reversal of that which came before, *Las Hurdes* becomes a more deliberate and reflective extension of the early ethnographic archive. Neat divisions dissolve. While my dissertation does not undertake an explicit rereading of *Las Hurdes*, a new interpretive lens for so-called "experimental ethnographic cinema" lingers beneath the surface of each of my chapters.

Early ethnography is an insufficiently theorized historical moment and visual practice. The search for more progressive, self-reflexive, and avant-garde manifestations of the ethnographic impulse began well before any understanding of the supposed model had been established. My dissertation pursues two corrective paths of inquiry. The first concerns the very term "early ethnographic cinema" and the collection of films to which it refers. What are the historical and visual boundaries of early ethnographic cinema? In my response, I look beyond the docu-fiction films of the 1920s—which film histories tend to situate at the origin of both ethnographic and non-fiction film production—to the very earliest encounters between cinema and

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genre," (7). Though I hesitate to ground the film in any one genre or documentary style, Rubinstein's analysis is compelling on two fronts. First, he concedes that parody involves more than overturning and rejection, but an embodiment and performance of the very structures targeted for critique. If we accept Buñuel's film as a parody of travelogue, we must equally accept its success as travelogue. Second, and more germane to my analysis here, in reading *Las Hurdes* as travelogue, Rubinstein acknowledges the instability of the film, not as a radical form of overturning or refutation, but as part of the very genre the film endeavors to parody. In the case of the travelogue, the format is inherently subject to disjunctions between sound and image, as well as ontological quandaries. As Rubinstein notes, "'travelogue' may properly be either a 'lecture illustrated by travel slides or films' or a 'narrated motion picture about travels.' It is thus implicit in the word 'travelogue' and in the genre 'travelogue' that voice and images may be subject to an ontological disparity normally supposed foreign to cinema," (8). Rubinstein's reading brings us closer to the kinds of crucial instabilities that can undergird both documentary and ethnographic cinema *before* their visual parody. See *Cinema Journal* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1983): 3-17.

ethnographic practice. The films and ethnographic projects that I examine in this dissertation are what many might consider marginal, peripheral, even illegitimate works. However, if one compares the canon of early ethnographic cinema to the field of non-fiction films that are guided by a search for unfamiliar bodies and geographies, for visible signs of racial and cultural difference, one soon realizes that the majority of early ethnographic films gather at the boundaries of the canon, excluded from the collection of legitimate ethnographic cinema. The second line of inquiry engages the films themselves and their mode(s) of representation. What kinds of formal devices, narrative techniques, or visual patterns inform early ethnographic cinema? *How* do these films *mean*? What do they communicate? The responses to these questions fail to articulate precise generic contours. Early ethnographic cinema combines a contested discursive space with an unwieldy range of production practices, formal techniques, and visual styles. The result is anything but stable, cohesive, or hegemonic.

In the twentieth century, ethnographic practice became a site of artistic play and visual experimentation at two distinct moments, in two separate ways. The first era of the ethnographic avant-garde began in the surrealist communities of Paris during the late 1920s. Artists and writers explored a fascination with collections, incongruous juxtapositions, the making strange of the familiar, and the familiarizing of the exotic. Some joined anthropologists and government officials on expeditions to colonies; others immersed themselves in the chaotic visual jumble of the *Musée Trocadero*. In 1929, Georges Bataille launched *Documents*, a journal dedicated to “archaeology, ethnology, art, and miscellany.” *Documents* examined the relationships between these disparate fields and challenged “the proper arrangement of cultural

symbols and artifacts.”<sup>15</sup> In 1930, Michel Leiris joined the Dakar-Djibouti mission; upon his return, he published two autobiographical ethnographies of the trip: *L’Afrique fantôme* (1934) and *L’Age d’homme* (1939). In 1937, the disciples of Marcel Mauss formed the *Collège de Sociologie*, which broadened the institutional reach of the *Documents* journal. Through conferences and academic publications, this loose network of artists and ethnographers emphasized, “those ritual moments when experience outside the normal flow of existence can find collective expression, moments when the cultural order is both transgressed and rejuvenated.”<sup>16</sup> During this first wave of ethnographic experimentation, the exotic spoils of ethnographic practice were treated as raw materials that needed to be transformed, transgressed, and remade. Radical collage undermined rigid taxonomies of difference. Images joined images without order or reason. The borders between sense and nonsense, here and elsewhere, self and other collapsed. For both Conley and Russell, this is the mode of resistant ethnographic practice to which *Las Hurdes* belongs.

The second era of ethnographic experimentation coalesced around a series of post-war events, including the decolonization of Africa and Asia, the post-structural critique of written ethnographic practice, and the publication of Bronislaw Malinowski’s diaries in 1967, whose disdain-laden pages dispelled the mythology of ethnographic objectivity. Against this backdrop of geographic and disciplinary upheaval, Jean Rouch began making ethnographic films in West Africa. His cinema challenged that of his mentors, including one of the founding members of the *Comité Français du Film Ethnographique*, Marcel Griaule. Rouch acknowledged the decidedly un-objective perspective of the ethnographer/filmmaker and invited his subjects to participate, narrate, and shape the content of his films. The effects of this

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<sup>15</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988): 132.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 141.

self-reflexive and dialogic approach, as well as the broader epistemic insecurities it both engaged and created, extended well beyond Rouch's secluded office in the *Musée de l'Homme*. By the mid-1960s, visual anthropology was a burgeoning field in both the United States and Europe, and a new generation of ethnographers, including Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, were developing concepts like "deep play" and "thick description" to recuperate and reimagine the possibilities of written ethnography. In contrast to the first wave of surrealist self-fashioning, in which new bodies and meanings were produced out of ethnographic encounters, this post-war wave of experimentation began to address the very real political and cultural stakes of this encounter, as well as the semiotic failures and inadequacies of ethnographic representation, as it had been conceived and conducted theretofore.

In this dissertation, I unsettle the division between early ethnographic cinema and these seemingly discrete waves of disciplinary play, overturning, and collapse. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French and Anglo anthropology collided with a second wave of European colonialism, new forms of visual reproduction, and a renewed interest in the unfamiliar and the faraway.<sup>17</sup> My project

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<sup>17</sup> As Donald Bender's history of anthropology explains, the American and French disciplinary traditions belong to separate nineteenth-century genealogies, which eventually (and interestingly) merge. The difference can be superficially detected in their terms. Both traditions have used "anthropology," "ethnology," "ethnography," and "sociology" interchangeably and with some frequency since the nineteenth century, but the American branch tends to invoke the term "anthropology" to refer to the discipline and "ethnography" to refer to the assemblage of practices which constitute anthropological fieldwork, whereas the French counterpart, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, shifts between "ethnology," "anthropology," and "ethnography" to refer to both the discipline and its fieldwork. As Bender explains, "The roots of anthropology as it is known in Britain and the United States are many. An interest in the nature of society has its beginnings in philosophy and an interest in the nature of man as a biological creature in medicine and biology. Probably the most important historical factor which influenced the development of anthropology is the fact of European expansion overseas," (140). Part philosophy, part social science, part biological science, and part imperial expansion. French anthropology shared in these influences and initially shared in the all-inclusive form of this new social science. But, with the influence of Durkheimian sociology in France, the new discipline divided in two. Durkheimian sociology covered the equivalent of social and cultural anthropology in the Anglo tradition, restricting French anthropology to physical anthropology. Of principle concern to French anthropologists at the time were descriptions of and comparisons between races, including "physical type, intellectual characteristics, morals, and language," (142). With the decline of Durkheimian sociology in the second quarter of the twentieth



examines the broad field of ethnographic cinema produced by film companies, government agencies, and academic institutions between the advent of cinema and the early 1930s. This rich historical window reveals an ethnographic practice shaped by visual collage, spatial disorientation, narrative dialogism, and surrealist possibilities. In his study of spatial representation, Tom Gunning similarly troubles the divide between early and experimental cinemas, sketching pathways from Méliès and Edison to Stan Brakhage, George Landow, and Michael Snow. Indeed, he sifts through the images of early cinema and uncovers a vibrant collection of practices, some of which resemble the post-war American avant-garde already underway and some of which could become a fertile source for new films and new experimental possibilities. Gunning writes:

Certainly early filmmakers envisioned no aesthetic project like that of the avant-garde filmmaker. It is dubious that any of these films were thought about aesthetically at all. However, they display quite nakedly new relations to the representations of space that the camera made possible. Some of these possibilities were rediscovered by the avant-garde. But every rediscovery is a recreation [...] History is what divides the approaches of early film from the avant-garde. If one of the projects of the avant-garde is to return to the origins of cinema, that return can only be historically aware. Early cinema offers a number of

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century, physical anthropology joined social science in France, thereafter adopting the term “ethnology” to designate the newly expanded discipline, a discipline that had ironically moved ever closer to Anglo-anthropology. Though French and American anthropology eventually coincide, Bender’s history fascinatingly underscores the many influences that shape both Anglo and French anthropology, as well as the uncertainty surrounding the disciplinary boundaries, vocabularies, and practices in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Bender, “The Development of French Anthropology,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (1969): 139-151. Jay Ruby also offers a concise history of American, British, and French contributions to visual anthropology in his essay, “Visual Anthropology,” *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, eds. David Levinson and Melvin Ember (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996): 1345-1351.

roads not taken, ambiguities not absorbed into commercial narrative cinema.<sup>18</sup>

Following Gunning, this dissertation sketches a number of roads not taken by commercial narrative cinema. However, it simultaneously sketches roads not always recognized or consciously retraced by the ethnographic avant-garde. That is to say, despite the startling resonances between them, a return to the origins of visual anthropology was not one of the central projects of either wave of ethnographic experimentation. Rather, to put pressure upon one of Gunning's most intriguing claims, this is a correspondence made possible by the camera, as well as the demands of ethnographic practice. To be clear, I do not recuperate early ethnographic cinema for any particular experimental movement. I do not remove a selection of ethnographic films from one side of the divide and reposition them on the other. Nor do I enact a kind of historical sleight of hand, uncovering a collection of never-before-seen surrealist or self-reflexive ethnographies. Instead, I argue that the conditions of ethnographic production—the historical, disciplinary, and material context out of which early ethnographic cinema emerges—guarantee the prescient instabilities and experimental forms that characterize so many of these films.

In reconsidering the boundaries of early ethnographic cinema, my dissertation likewise intersects with histories and theories of early cinema, including yet another crucial contribution from Gunning. Early ethnographic cinema neither wholly participates in what he terms the “cinema of attractions,” nor coheres around the micro-narrative structures that guide André Gaudreault. It neither indulges exhibitionist pleasures, nor communicates simple narrative threads. Early ethnographic cinema demands a more inclusive set of terms, as well as a careful

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<sup>18</sup> Tom Gunning, “An Unseen Energy Swallows Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film,” *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John L. Fell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983): 365-366.

reconsideration of what early cinema can look like and what kinds of meaning these films can produce. Moreover, when one considers the forms of ethnographic film that were made between the advent of cinema and the early 1930s, an unfamiliar history unfolds. Ethnographic cinema eludes the transitional period, the shift from non-fiction to fiction, which informs the development of mainstream cinema in the United States and Western Europe. In some ways, the term “early” miscategorizes the archive, the content of its films. It implies an after, a later, a more modern period that never actually arrives. Even the docu-fiction films of the 1920s and early 1930s retain something of the illegibility and instability that define their non-fiction counterparts. Early ethnographic cinema traces a distinct path through film history, disturbing the aesthetic categories that tend to structure it: attraction and narration, non-fiction and fiction, early and everything after.

The interpretation of *Las Hurdes* as a subversion of cinematic tradition draws upon prevailing histories of ethnographic and documentary cinema, and consequently adopts the very same blind spots that plague these accounts. These histories overwhelmingly tend to locate the “real” beginning of these cinematic modes in the career of Robert Flaherty and his docu-fiction disciples in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> They fail to take seriously the nearly three decades of cinema that precede Flaherty’s projects or John Grierson’s alleged coining of the term “documentary.”<sup>20</sup> With a shared vocabulary of birth, primitivity, and evolution, these pervasive historical narratives successfully conceal alternative ethnographic and documentary impulses. The very

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<sup>19</sup> Flaherty’s feature-length celebration of a “happy-go-lucky” Inuit family spurred the production of subsequent docu-fiction feature films by F.W. Murnau, Merian C. Cooper, and Ernest B. Schoedsack. In the decade prior to the release of *Las Hurdes*, these filmmakers released *Grass* (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1925), *Moana* (Flaherty, 1926), *Chang* (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1927), and *Tabu* (Flaherty and Murnau, 1931).

<sup>20</sup> The first use of the term “documentary” is widely attributed to John Grierson of the British Documentary Film Movement. It appeared in his well-known response to Flaherty’s second-feature film, *Moana*. See John Grierson, “Flaherty,” *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth H. Hardy (New York: Faber & Faber, 1946).

earliest ethnographic films become mere precursors to the more legible, narrative, and commercially successful *Nanook of the North*. In the pages that follow, I offer a more detailed précis of the histories and analyses that define the encounter between ethnographic practice and visual reproduction. I pose the questions that guide this dissertation: What is ethnographic cinema? When does it begin? These questions invite replies from anthropologists and film scholars. More than a complete portrait of early ethnographic cinema, these discourses articulate a series of shared historical and theoretical gaps to which my dissertation chapters will respond.

*(Non)Narrative, (Sur)Realist, Counter(Text): Mythologies of Ethnographic Cinema*

In his canonical history of documentary film, Erik Barnouw devotes one brief chapter to what he calls “prophets.” These figures include Eadweard Muybridge, Étienne-Jules Marey, Thomas Edison, and the Lumière brothers. Though documentary forms of cinema dominated the first decade of American and European film production, fiction films began to gain popularity around 1907. They outsold actualities, travelogues, and other non-fiction formats, and gradually eclipsed the “prophetic” energies of cinema’s founders. Barnouw argues that, “the documentary was to some extent a victim of its quick success. Many producers continued to follow the formulas that had won such instant acclaim. Meanwhile the fiction film was in a period of innovation—Méliès, Porter, and soon many others.”<sup>21</sup> Unlike histories of narrative cinema, which tend to draw a line of continuous progress toward the ideal of classical cinema or continuity editing patterns, histories of documentary film frequently articulate two beginnings. The “first” beginning fails. Documentary cinema appears, stagnates, and dies, all in the space of about ten years. Roughly fifteen years later, Flaherty arrives. His work marks the “second” beginning. In Barnouw’s second

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<sup>21</sup> Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974): 21-22.

chapter, entitled “Images at Work,” Flaherty greets us on the first page.<sup>22</sup> Narrative continuity and, not unrelated, unprecedented commercial success seem to be what finally “work” and thus mark the beginning of the documentary film tradition in earnest.

Anthropologist David MacDougall charts an altogether different trajectory for the history of ethnographic cinema, though he ultimately positions Flaherty at its origin.<sup>23</sup> MacDougall’s history depends upon the concepts of primitivity and evolution that, in recent decades, early film historians have labored so tirelessly to debunk.<sup>24</sup> Although MacDougall acknowledges early practitioners in the field of ethnographic film, including Alfred Cort Haddon and Baldwin Spencer, he compares their works to “what is often called ‘primitive cinema.’”<sup>25</sup> MacDougall envisions himself, as an ethnographic filmmaker, at the ideal historical position: the evolutionary end of decades of progressive innovation. He argues, “Haddon and Spencer could do little more with a camera than set it on a tripod, point it at something of possible interest, and turn the crank. No doubt this is essentially what we still do today, but we

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<sup>22</sup> Barnouw is not alone in this particular vision of documentary history. In a more recent collection of essays on documentary film edited by Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski, *Documenting the Documentary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), the explicit aim was to “place the essays in chronological order according to when the films discussed were made,” (15). William Rothman’s essay, “The Filmmaker as Hunter: Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*” inaugurates the collection.

<sup>23</sup> David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> See André Gaudreault, “Detours in Film Narrative: the Development of Cross-Cutting,” *Cinema 1900-1906: An Analytical Study* (Brussels: FIAF, 1982): 181-200; Gaudreault, “Temporality and Narrativity in Early Cinema (1895-1908),” *Cinema 1900-1906: An Analytical Study*, (Brussels: FIAF, 1982): 201-215; Gaudreault, “Theatricality, Narrativity, and “Trickality”: Reevaluating the Cinema of Georges Méliès,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 15, no. 3, (Fall 1987): 110-119; Gaudreault, “Narration and Monstration in the Cinema,” *Journal of Film and Video* 39, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 29-36; Tom Gunning, “The Non-Continuous Style of Early Film: 1900-1906,” *Cinema, 1900-1906: An Analytical Study*, ed. Roger Holman (Brussels: FIAF, 1982): 219-29; Gunning, “‘Primitive’ Cinema: A Frame Up? Or The Trick’s on Us?,” *Cinema Journal* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 3-12; Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions,” *Early Cinema*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990): 56-62; Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator,” *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994): 114-133.

<sup>25</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, 235.

have the great advantage of imagining the outcome as a sophisticated form of communication, with a hundred years of cinematic experimentation and convention to guide us.”<sup>26</sup> MacDougall thus maps a continuous terrain, from primitive beginnings to sophisticated ends.

At the same time, MacDougall articulates a “dark age” in the history of visual anthropology, a moment in which anthropological institutions abandoned photography and film for written ethnographies and fieldwork. While this historical rupture echoes the divide that defines Barnouw’s documentary history, MacDougall locates this rupture just after Flaherty’s remarkable debut. He thus understands ethnographic cinema as divided between two historical frames. The first frame corresponds to the early fumbblings between science and visual media. In this period, anthropological institutions used cinema as an instrument of scientific precision and produced “objects to be held at arm’s length.”<sup>27</sup> The second frame corresponds to the post-war period. In this historical moment, MacDougall uncovers a revision of earlier forms and a rethinking of the relationship between filmmaker and subject community, as well as that of audience and image. And yet, MacDougall reasserts Flaherty’s position at the origin of these new innovations:

Flaherty’s achievement was in many ways more radical than anyone realized at the time, despite the acclaim surrounding the film. Its apparent simplicity, its naïveté, masked a fundamentally different approach to understanding other cultures, a focus on the individual that would only flower in anthropology several years later in the Culture and Personality school. It was produced after a period of long-term fieldwork that resembled Malinowski’s but had an added dialogic and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 236.

collaborative dimension. Flaherty's films also proposed a narrative approach to ethnography quite unprecedented in anthropology of the time. Like the "life history" ethnographies published many years later, the film suggested that narrative might be one of the only ways of grasping how social forces actually converge upon an individual in society.<sup>28</sup>

Several aspects of MacDougall's remarkable synthesis are worth noting here. Despite the acknowledgement of a "dark age" in visual anthropology and a division between pre- and post-war ethnographic cinema, Flaherty survives the gap and remains the predecessor for future endeavors in visual anthropology. The filmmakers and film practices that precede Flaherty thus virtually disappear. The notion of a cinematic "dark age" eliminates the need for further reflection upon previous ethnographic endeavors. Flaherty himself was lucky to have survived. MacDougall's history neatly contains Flaherty's predecessors in the pre-dark age period. No other historical traces need be seriously considered.

Jean Rouch suggests yet another origin. He insists that April 4, 1901 marks the "official" beginning of ethnographic filmmaking.<sup>29</sup> On that day, Baldwin Spencer recorded an Aborigine dance and rain ceremony in Australia. Upon initial consideration, this claim challenges the standard chronologies thus far encountered and perhaps confirms Rouch's unique perspective in American and European anthropology. However, in his seminal essay, "Film Ethnographique," Rouch clarifies precisely what kind of "beginning" the work of someone like Spencer commemorates. Rouch divides the history of ethnographic cinema into three categories: (1) *les prophètes* (prophets), which includes the work of Marey, Regnault, and the Lumière

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>29</sup> Jean Rouch, "Avant Propos," *Premier catalogue sélectif international de films ethnographiques sur la région du Pacifique* (Paris: UNESCO, 1970): 13.

brothers, (2) *les précurseurs géniaux* (brilliant precursors), which refers readers to the work of Vertov and Flaherty, and (3) *le renouveau des années 40* (revival of the 1940s), a broad category that acknowledges the “tentative” efforts of Rouch’s cinematic mentor, Marcel Griaule, just before and after World War II. Nevertheless, Rouch ultimately grounds the productive or authentic “revival” of ethnographic cinema in the late 1940s and beyond, a historical window that rather happily coincides with his own efforts.<sup>30</sup> What is more, the very language of this history—prophets, precursors, and revival—reveals a striking harmony with American histories of ethnographic cinema.

Like MacDougall, Rouch erects a considerable historical divide between a primitive era of ethnographic cinema—produced by prophets and precursors—and a remarkable post-war age of enlightenment. And, like MacDougall, Rouch lingers on the strangely exceptional Flaherty. He credits him with (yet another) birth of ethnographic film and what would become, for Rouch, the essential feature of the genre: participant observation.<sup>31</sup> He writes, “During the fifteen months of filming *Nanook*, Flaherty [...] invented everything and put everything into practice: preliminary contact, friendship, indispensable knowledge of the subject to be filmed [...] We are still learning the always-new lessons of our old master from 1921.”<sup>32</sup> Rouch nevertheless tempers his support. He describes Flaherty as a kind of savant, wandering in the dark age of cinema, unaware of his own methods and incapable of developing the discipline. Rouch claims, “[Flaherty] was an ethnographer—without knowing or wanting it—who gave the greatest lesson of patience and tenacity to those

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<sup>30</sup> Rouch, “Film Ethnographique,” *Ethnologie Générale*, ed. Jean Poirier (Paris: Gallimard, 1968): 435.

<sup>31</sup> Jay Ruby adds further support to Rouch’s claims, positing Flaherty as the precursor to Rouch and *cinéma vérité*. See Ruby, “A Reexamination of the Early Career of Robert J. Flaherty,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1980): 431-457.

<sup>32</sup> Rouch, “Film Ethnographique,” *Ethnologie Générale*, 449. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.



who want to dedicate themselves to studying other men [...] Flaherty discovered this strange kind of mise-en-scène there, spontaneously. He had no recipe. He just found the most effective of solutions.”<sup>33</sup> Both respected father and primitive child, Flaherty planted the seeds of ethnographic filmmaking. But these seeds would not bear fruit, would not *really* develop into ethnographic cinema proper until several decades later, when Rouch began making his fully aware, fully reflexive ethnographic films.<sup>34</sup>

In all of these histories, a tendency to interpret cinema through the lens of evolutionary progress collides with the articulation of historical rupture. As a result, Flaherty becomes the placeholder for the end of the primitive period and the primitive beginning of modern documentary and ethnographic cinema. These readings neatly simplify the demands placed upon the historian. S/he need not sort through the messy fits and starts of the first decade or—if one were to adopt MacDougall or Rouch’s historical timeline—the first thirty years. Flaherty miraculously arrives and the evolution of cinema toward its proper destination begins in this pure moment of “rebirth.”<sup>35</sup>

While it is conceivable that a film like *Las Hurdes* responds to the work of Flaherty and his disciples, the frequency with which Flaherty’s name appears as a placeholder for the convergence of documentary and ethnographic cinema speaks to a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Rouch’s version of ethnographic cinema has become a kind of master narrative among contemporary French anthropologists and scholars of ethnographic film. The term “film ethnographique” refers to a very particular practice, a practice inextricably grounded in the aftermath of World War II, a practice that rethinks anthropology and ethnographic methodologies, a practice that, no matter what kinds of homage are paid to prophets and precursors, begins with and only ever refers back to Jean Rouch. The linguistic discrepancy between American and French usage of the term crystallized for me in Jean Rouch’s former office at the *Musée de l’Homme*. When I requested access to all examples of early ethnographic cinema—any films produced before World War II—I received blank stares from the staff of the *Comité du Film Ethnographique*. A few moments later, Laurent Pelle explained that, “they don’t exist.” He meant this literally. The museum held no films made prior to World War II. But he also meant that the very description, “ethnographic films produced before World War II,” made no sense. Rouch’s archive at the *Musée de l’Homme* quite aptly illustrates his understanding of the term. No ethnographic films predate Rouch.

<sup>35</sup> Barnouw, *Documentary*, 30.

historical refusal to consider the difficult and inconsistent ground of early ethnographic cinema. These historical refusals nevertheless open onto our second point of inquiry. Given the significant gaps that emerge in the histories of non-fiction and ethnographic cinema, what visual forms gather beneath this term? What is “ethnographic cinema”? What does this visual practice look like and how does it mean?

Two distinct voices respond and they speak to a kind of dual history or binary genealogy, torn as the genre is between anthropological and documentary impulses, science and cinema. Following the “dark ages” of visual anthropology and World War II, a marked increase in institutionally-supported ethnographic film production began in the fifties with the work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in the United States, followed shortly thereafter by the films of Marcel Griaule and Jean Rouch in France. A number of anthropological and academic institutions—including the American Museum of Natural History, Harvard University, the Educational Development Center (funded by Harvard, M.I.T., and the National Science Foundation), the *Musée de l’Homme*, and the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*—increased financial and academic support for ethnographic film projects. The first American conference on filmmaking in anthropology was held at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1964. In 1969, Jay Ruby began organizing an annual conference on visual anthropology. By 1972, a fifth edition of Robert Gardner’s “Films for Anthropological Teaching” was published with more than 500 titles on the list.<sup>36</sup> In spite of this complex financial and academic infrastructure, post-war American and French anthropology struggled independently, and for many years in complete disagreement, to define ethnographic film and the potential risks and contributions it could make to the field.

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<sup>36</sup> Karl G. Heider, *Ethnographic Film* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976): 42-43.

In 1976, anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker Karl Heider published a brief text entitled *Ethnographic Film*. The work became a handbook for ethnographic filmmakers, as well as a concise articulation of institutional doctrine.<sup>37</sup> In his study, Heider explicitly refuses to define not only ethnographic cinema, but also ethnography writ large. Instead, he claims, an ethnographic film should be judged by its “ethnographicness” or the degree to which it adheres to what he terms “ethnographic understanding.” Heider offers readers four ethnographic principles against which the efforts of ethnographic film—its ethnographicness—can be judged. First, ethnography is a way of making a detailed description and analysis of human behavior based on long-term observational study. Ethnographic cinema must not simply record the activities of a particular community, but analyze them. An ethnographer recognizes signs (rituals, behaviors, gestures, etc.) and comes to a reasonable understanding of their signification. Second, ethnography relates observed behavior to cultural norms. It makes claims about a population or a culture, rather than simply an individual or a family living within a particular community. Ethnographers come to an understanding of a sign’s signification within a collective context. Third, ethnography strives for holism. In the case of ethnographic cinema, this requires the representation of whole people in whole acts. Heider means this literally. He discourages filmmakers from using close-ups and insists that an event must be shown in its entirety. Finally, the major goal of ethnography is truth. Ethnographers make claims supported by evidence observed in the field.

Although Heider advocates for the continued development of visual anthropology, his principles paradoxically reveal an absolute faith in written practice

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<sup>37</sup> At the time of Heider’s writing, the future of ethnographic cinema in anthropological practice was anything but certain. His text exemplifies anthropology’s relationship to ethnographic cinema, just prior to its ideological crisis and “experimental” turn. He was involved in a number of film projects, including Robert Gardner’s *Dead Birds*, and later produced several of his own films, including *Dani Sweet Potatoes* (1974) and *Dani Houses* (1974).

and an incredible anxiety in the face of cinema's encroaching influence. Though a film must be judged by its ethnographicness, the standard against which ethnographic cinema must be judged—ethnographicness itself—is written ethnography. Heider thus defines ethnographic cinema as inherently disadvantaged in all four ethnographic principles. Ethnographic cinema simply cannot analyze its evidence or make explicit and well-supported claims in the same way as its written counterpart. Heider argues, "No ethnographic film can stand by itself. An ethnographic film must be supplemented by written ethnographic materials. Or, put the other way around, an ethnography is a written work which may be supplemented by film."<sup>38</sup> Heider insists that in order to obtain a high degree of ethnographicness, films need to be accompanied by written handbooks, detailing the choices that were made, the context and conditions of filming, the conclusions that one should draw from a film, and any changes made between the visual material as it was filmed and the final cinematic product. In short, the film should reactivate written forms of ethnographic understanding.

For Heider, the difference between written and filmed ethnography is an ontological one. Throughout the text, he returns to the notion that "words lend themselves to generalizing statements more easily than does film, while the specificity of the film image makes filmic generalizations less satisfactory and more manipulative."<sup>39</sup> Heider understands ethnographic cinema as burdened by the conditions of cinematic representation. It records moments and people with remarkable temporal and visual specificity. It cannot generalize (without an extensive written supplement of conclusions, explanations, etc.). Ethnographic cinema likewise presents very real limitations to ethnography's holistic aims. In a particularly

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<sup>38</sup> Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, 96.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

revealing example, Heider asserts, “It is easy to construct sentences after the fact which will describe the beginnings of an act. But it is much more difficult to have a camera at the right time and the right place to capture an act as it is beginning.”<sup>40</sup> Words allow ethnographers an expressive and temporal flexibility that cinema simply does not have.

To be sure, Heider makes a weak case against cinema. Ethnographers can certainly manipulate their written data and, indeed, this seems to be the kind of space that Heider would like to preserve for written ethnographies, while simultaneously deflecting the dangerous potential of manipulation upon cinema’s specificity. In the case of Heider’s insistence upon a holistic approach to ethnography, ease of manipulation seems to be precisely what is at stake. If an ethnographic filmmaker fails to record the footage at the beginning (or middle, or end) of an important event, s/he cannot easily mend such gaps. Not so with writing. Written ethnographies need not contain the gaps that frequently puncture ethnographic cinema. Moreover, in providing principles of ethnographicness, rather than a clear definition of the discipline, we are never in the position to analyze these principles against the demands of ethnographic practice, its ultimate aims and objectives, or the kinds of data it should ideally generate. Heider desperately wants to deposit writing in the category of “science” and cinema in the category of “aesthetics,” making ethnographic cinema the illegitimate offspring or helpful tool of real ethnographic analysis.<sup>41</sup> More than anthropology’s indebtedness to science or truth, his analysis reveals a plain preference for written ethnographic practice and the kinds of knowledge that language allows ethnographers to produce. While Heider’s history of ethnographic cinema begins with

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to note the ways in which this discourse resonates with early critics of photography. See Charles Baudelaire’s angst-laden critique, “The Salon of 1859,” *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988): 123-126.

Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* and charts a familiar trajectory of ethnographic cinema, only a handful of films exhibit a "high degree" of ethnographicness. None perfectly embodies the ideal.

A comprehensive survey of post-war American visual anthropology would take us far afield. However, one should note that Heider is by no means an exception in the field of visual anthropology. A cohort of pro-cinema anthropologists—including Timothy Asch, David MacDougall, Jay Ruby, Richard Sorenson, and Sol Worth—share his definition of ethnographic cinema, his anxiety in determining its anthropological function, and his firm exclusion of earlier ethnographic films. Beginning in the late 1960s, this collective published a range of articles that wrestled with the ontology of visual technologies and provided detailed instructions on how to make a "real" ethnographic film.<sup>42</sup> In the most concise articulation of the community's commitment to the unknown and not-yet-understood import of cinema, Ruby writes, "Preserving the film record of human difference is important even if we cannot yet figure out how to utilize it."<sup>43</sup> Although their prescriptions lack the kind of consistency that the group no doubt sought to establish, one can locate a general consensus among them. Each member of this collective defends, on the one hand, why film recording is so valuable and, on the other hand, why it necessarily fails to

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<sup>42</sup> See Timothy Asch, "Collaboration in Ethnographic Filmmaking: A Personal View," *Anthropological Filmmaking* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishing, 1988): 1-30; Asch, "Ethnographic Film: Structure and Function," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 2 (1973): 179-187; Asch, "Ethnographic Film and the Yanomamo Indians," *Sight Lines* 5, no. 3 (1972): 5-12; Asch and Patsy Asch, "Film in Anthropological Research," *Senri Ethnological Studies* 24 (1988): 165-189; David MacDougall, "Ethnographic Film: Failure and Promise," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 405-425; Jay Ruby, "In a Pic's Eye: Interpretive Strategies for Deriving Significance and Meaning from Photographs," *Working Papers in Culture and Communication* 1, no. 2 (1977): 22-38; Ruby, "Is an Ethnographic Film a Filmic Ethnography?," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 2 (1975): 104-111; Richard Sorenson, "Anthropological Film: A Scientific and Humanistic Resource," *Science* 189, no. 4169 (1974): 1079-1085; Sorenson, "A Research Film Program in the Study of Changing Man," *Current Anthropology* 8, no. 5 (1967): 443-469; Sol Worth, "Doing Anthropology of Visual Communication," *Working Papers in Culture and Communication* 1, no. 2 (1977): 2-21.

<sup>43</sup> Ruby, "The Professionalization of Visual Anthropology in United States, the 1960s and 1970s," *Visual Anthropology Review* 17, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2000-2001): 8.

serve as a comprehensive and independent ethnography. Asch argues, “The value of the film camera lies in its ability to do and record what the human eye cannot. Film can stop time, merely slow it, or compress hours into seconds. It can, in this way, view subjects as small, like gestures, facial expressions, and body synchronizations, or as large, like patterns of travel within a village, as the filmmaker desires.”<sup>44</sup> Similarly, MacDougall suggests, “We are beginning to discover how film can fill some of the blind spots.”<sup>45</sup>

Whatever failures of human vision ethnographic film might correct, its introduction to the field unearthed innumerable “blind spots” in the documentary film record. Film can record an object or event for later viewing and study, but as Asch’s description indicates, it likewise offers a staggering range of visual flexibility, largely determined by the subjective choices of the anthropologist/filmmaker. Bound up with human intervention, ethnographic film fails to satisfy the disciplinary demands for objectivity and entirety. Asch recommends that ethnographers “fill in information” with a kind of Heider-esque written supplement. Ruby offers a set of strict guidelines that filmmakers should follow in order to make their work more objective and well respected within the anthropological community.<sup>46</sup> Alternatively, MacDougall’s writings and films reflect a rethinking of ethnographic cinema and ethnographic practice. He writes:

Even if it were possible to devise codes that would allow film to approach the forms of written anthropology, one must ask whether such an approach would open up the most productive path for ethnographic film. Not only does film have capacities for revelation that differ from

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<sup>44</sup> Asch, “Ethnographic Film: Structure and Function,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 179.

<sup>45</sup> MacDougall, “Ethnographic Film: Failure and Promise,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 424.

<sup>46</sup> Ruby, “Is an Ethnographic Film a Filmic Ethnography?,” *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, 104-111.

those of language, but it provides an opportunity for interrogating the concept of scientific communication, which assumes that language is an instrument for transmitting messages that progressively delineate the world. From fairly early on, a few films have implicitly challenged that assumption, and such thinking has begun to transform the modern ethnographic film.<sup>47</sup>

The “few films” to which MacDougall refers include the works of Jean Rouch. Though by no means an anti-establishment filmmaker, MacDougall opens the door to reflexivity, experimentation, and transparent subjectivity. Moreover, in acknowledging that cinema has its own unique “capacities for revelation,” MacDougall not only abandons the traditional effort to make film behave more like writing, but also suggests that film destabilizes ethnographic methods. In doing so, ethnographic cinema creates a productive discursive space within which the objectivity and precision of anthropology can be challenged. MacDougall describes the possibilities of a new ethnographic cinema, yet another beginning. Indeed, he never looks back to early film, to the instabilities and experimental formations that may be always and already there.

Cinema scholars issue an alternative definition of ethnographic film, one that cares little about institutional standards of ethnographicness. The term “ethnography” designates a wide range of practices that discover, explore, colonize, measure, scrutinize, or visually represent unfamiliar people and places. Ethnographic cinema is but one among many purveyors of the ethnographic impulse, one symptom of a much larger cultural phenomenon. In his foundational text, *Ideology and Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media*, Bill Nichols encourages a rethinking of ethnographic film as an ideologically motivated form. He claims, “Ideology is a

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<sup>47</sup> MacDougall, “Ethnographic Film: Failure and Promise,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 422.



word seldom used in studies of other cultures, and considerations of who defines culture and how (where do We draw the line around Them?) or, even more, of the ideological implications of representing one culture to another receive scant attention.”<sup>48</sup> *Ideology and Image* was published in 1981—only five years after Heider’s assessment of ethnographic cinema—and film scholars vociferously responded. Ideology critique continues to serve as one of the principle reading strategies in analyses of ethnographic cinema. Film studies defines the practice as motivated by ideology, equal to its ideological underpinnings.

In a more recent analysis of ethnographic cinema, Fatimah Tobing Rony satisfies Nichols’s demand to think through the ideological implications of ethnographic film. She writes:

The category of ‘ethnographic film,’ at least in the popular imagination, is still by and large racially defined. The people depicted in an ‘ethnographic film’ are meant to be seen as exotic, as people who until only too recently were categorized by science as Savage and Primitive, of an earlier evolutionary stage in the overall history of humankind: people without history, without writing, without civilization, without technology, without archives. In other words, people considered “ethnographiable,” in the bipolar schema articulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, as opposed to people classified as “historifiable,” the posited audience of the ethnographic film, those considered to have written archives and thus a history proper.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981): 238.

<sup>49</sup> Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 7.

Rony focuses on the impulse out of which ethnographic cinema is produced. She equates this film practice with intentions and underlying motivations, as well as the written work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. She locates what an ethnographic film “means” to show. One should also note that, much like MacDougall’s and Heider’s histories, Rony’s analysis moves from Félix-Louis Regnault’s motion studies to Flaherty’s “taxidermic mode.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, she leaps from proto-cinematic images to *Nanook of the North*, bypassing roughly thirty years of ethnographic cinema. Nevertheless, Rony reads against these texts. She resists them. For her, the identification of a film as “ethnographic” depends less upon its proclaimed objectivity and scientific affiliations than the uneven distribution of power between the complex of institutions and individuals involved in the production and consumption of an ethnographic film—including the museum and/or film company, the director and/or ethnographer, and the spectator—and the landscapes, individuals, or ideas that these films aim to represent. The very title of her text—*The Third Eye*—at once signals the experience, as a person of color, of seeing oneself transformed by media into an object *and* the possibility of seeing “the very process which creates the internal splitting, to witness the conditions which give rise to the double consciousness described by Du Bois.”<sup>51</sup> The third eye allows for “a clarity of vision even as it marks the site of socially mediated self-alienation.”<sup>52</sup> Rony’s analysis performs this meta-function of sight. It marks the moments when cinema, no matter its institutional affiliations, transforms individuals into objects of ethnographic scrutiny.

Understanding the ideological foundations of ethnographic cinema serves an important function. It contextualizes these films, foregrounds the racist and colonial impulses that frequently buttress ethnographic practice, and guides a reading of the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

triangulated encounter between director, subject, and spectator. However, the prevalence of ideology critique often conceals the ontological particularities of cinema and the specificity of the ethnographic film image. Rather than a sustained reflection on the encounter between ethnographic ideology and cinema, critics reduce ethnographic cinema *to* ideology, to a tension between the powerful and the powerless, the colony and the colonized. The term “ethnographic cinema” has become a kind of shorthand for a bundle of racist, colonial, or “primitive” images. On the rare occasion that a critic defines ethnographic cinema as something more than a kind of abstract ideological impulse, readers nearly always find themselves directed to the infamous *Nanook of the North*.

As the supposed origin of ethnographic cinema, *Nanook of the North* has received a great deal of scrutiny in film studies and more attention than any other ethnographic film. As though by way of required preface, scholars outline the deceptions and manipulations that were involved in the making of the film: the family was dressed in traditional clothing that they no longer actually wore, scenes were re-enacted or staged, Nanook’s second wife was elided in favor of a more familiar family structure, etc. Flaherty constructed an image of Inuit life as he imagined it to be. For visual anthropologists like Heider, Flaherty’s film demonstrates an early effort to present “whole people in whole acts,” but the film ultimately fails to meet the highest standards of ethnographicness. For documentary film scholars, *Nanook of the North* raises interesting questions about authenticity, objectivity, and visual truth. For ethnographic film scholars, the film embodies the early period of ethnographic film production. It participates in the cultural fascination with exotic natives and demonstrates the ways in which their images were manipulated to satisfy Western fantasies. Rony terms this visual mode “taxidermy” insofar as it “seeks to make that

which is dead look as if it were living.”<sup>53</sup> According to Rony, Flaherty represents Allakariallak—the real name of the individual who plays Nanook—as being always on the precipice of death, in the process of dying, or already dead. Keith Beattie and William Rothman refer to the film as “salvage ethnography,” a form of ethnographic practice that insists upon preserving traditions, which, in reality, never existed, have already changed, or are completely obsolete.<sup>54</sup> All of these analyses foreground Flaherty’s interventions and manipulations. And, in many ways, Flaherty demands this kind of engagement. His oft-quoted claim, “Sometimes you have to lie. One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit,” does not sit well with the intuitions of most.<sup>55</sup>

The narrative structure of *Nanook of the North* likewise receives a great deal of critical attention. For Heider, the film tells a simple story and adheres to the ethnographic necessity of coherent expression. Film scholars call attention to the awkward intersection of commercial narrative forms and ethnographic subjects. For Rony, the series of simple adventures and “day in the life” generalities reflect Flaherty’s superficial understanding of the ethnographic subject, his belief that the “Ethnographic is without intellect: he or she is best represented as merely existing.”<sup>56</sup> Rothman emphasizes the intrinsic contradiction of the film: a supposed documentary neatly structured as a fictional narrative. He claims, “The story Flaherty tells is quite different from those his contemporary D.W. Griffith was telling. But Flaherty’s story, like Griffith’s, did not really happen; it is literally a fiction. And insofar as Nanook is

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>54</sup> See Keith Beattie, “Men With Movie Cameras,” *Documentary Screens* (New York: Palgrave, 2004): 26-62; William Rothman, “The Filmmaker as Hunter: Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*,” *Documenting the Documentary*, 23-39. One could certainly argue that the terms “taxidermy” and “salvage” describe entangled, interrelated concepts. Salvage ethnography perhaps hinges upon taxidermy. In other words, subjects are preserved or brought back to life so as to be represented as on the verge of death, corruption, or extinction.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Arthur Calder-Marshall, *The Innocent Eye: The Life of Robert Flaherty* (London: W.H. Allen, 1963): 97.

<sup>56</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 104.

the protagonist of such a story, he is as fictional as any Griffith character.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, *Nanook of the North* tells the story of a fictional character and a fictional family, battling against nature and ultimately surviving. While the film’s simple structure perhaps guaranteed its commercial success, it likewise invites the kind of extensive criticism that Rony and Rothman dispatch.

In light of the enormous critical attention garnered by *Nanook of the North*—both the commendations and denunciations—I offer a different reading of its place in the history of ethnographic and documentary cinema. The legibility of *Nanook of the North* secured not only its status as the first ethnographic and documentary film, but also its position as *the* representative of early ethnographic cinema and *the* institution against which subsequent ethnographic films would be compared. Indeed, it seems an unlikely coincidence that the first ethnographic and documentary film so closely resembles commercial narrative forms. Perhaps we can better frame *Nanook of the North* as the first ethnographic and documentary film that scholars and critics were prepared to engage. *Nanook of the North* simplifies the history of ethnographic film, as well as the demands of critical engagement. Put another way, *Nanook of the North* offers an easy means by which to dismantle and dismiss early ethnographic cinema.

In ethnographic film studies, *Nanook of the North* inspires a rich collection of close readings and critical analyses, albeit one commonly guided by ideology critique. However, *Nanook of the North* has become a kind of synecdoche, obscuring and concealing the first thirty years of early ethnographic cinema, fashioning a coherent and hegemonic institution where none exists. Allusions to *Nanook of the North* occur over and over again in comparative studies of ethnographic cinema. The film serves as the institutional counterpoint, the tradition, the standard. It delineates the shape of experimental ethnography through oversimplified binaries: narrative/non-narrative,

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<sup>57</sup> Rothman, “The Filmmaker as Hunter,” *Documenting the Documentary*, 25.

continuous/fragmented, immersive/disruptive, etc. It is the flawed precursor to *Las Hurdes*. More importantly, scholars invoke the name *Nanook of the North* so as to refer to a compressed understanding of ethnographic ideology, extracted from more nuanced readings of the film. The practice of ethnographic cinema has subsequently been defined as one that manipulates its subjects, draws a stark dividing line between “us” and “them,” and submits to the conventions of commercial narrative film.

So, we are left with two incompatible definitions. Anthropology defines ethnographic cinema as the tool of traditional ethnography, always subservient to written practice and seemingly incapable of attaining the highest degree of anthropological exactitude. Film studies removes ethnographic cinema from these institutional boundaries and equates it with the ideological apparatus that stimulates the tireless search for bodies and landscapes, uncorrupted by anything other than the Western imagination. Both definitions rely upon an abridged history of cinema that takes the coherent docu-fiction forms of *Nanook of the North* as a rather inconceivable starting point.

One definition of ethnographic cinema manages to escape this conflict. It belongs neither to a rigid anthropological tradition, nor the limited purview of cinema studies, but moves between them, outside of them. It originates in French visual anthropology and is elaborated upon and complicated by its most celebrated member, a figure already encountered in the “histories” of ethnographic cinema: Jean Rouch. In 1952, the *Comité Français du Film Ethnographique* held its second general assembly meeting.<sup>58</sup> Members included Marcel Griaule, Henri Vallois, Georges-Henri Rivière, Patrick O'Reilly, Léon Pales, and Germaine Dieterlan. One of the aims of the meeting was to define ethnographic film, to outline what did and did not belong to this visual practice. The collective response could not have been more reflective of the

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<sup>58</sup> Rouch, “Film Ethnographique,” *Ethnologie Générale*, 431.

ambivalence and inherent hybridity of mid-twentieth century French visual anthropology: “It seems that one could say a film is ethnographic when it combines the rigor of scientific inquest with the art of cinematic documentation.”<sup>59</sup> This initial articulation resonates with the first wave of the ethnographic avant-garde, the collisions and collages that unfolded between anthropology and art.<sup>60</sup> But, as visual anthropology was in the process of combining forces with cinema and refreshing the possibilities of a union between art and science, the “non-visual” branch of French anthropology was in the process of reconstituting its institutional boundaries and inching ever closer to the language and practice of the Anglo anthropological tradition.<sup>61</sup> The committee’s vision of ethnography’s future thus met with considerable resistance. Rouch concisely outlines several points of tension:

One must understand that, for a long time, there was a movement of strong resistance to ethnographic film on behalf of ethnologists. For their part, film technicians were not in favor of these new techniques because, they estimated, that it was useless to give a minimal education to amateurs who would never come to possess the requisite professional qualities. Ethnologists rose up against the notion of film

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>60</sup> The *Musée de l’Homme* is an excellent physical or architectural example of the intersections between art and science in France. In 1938, the museum was founded. That same year, the International Surrealist Exhibition was held in Paris; Henri Langlois founded the *Cinémathèque Française* (which was initially housed at the museum); the museum began offering courses in filmmaking; and Robert Flaherty visited the institution to screen *Nanook of the North* and *Moana*. The museum became a meeting place for artists, anthropologists, and those who found themselves somewhere in-between, including the members of the *Collège de Sociologie*. Between 1940 and 1941, the museum kept its doors open and the *Cinémathèque* functioning. Langlois screened films that were banned by the Vichy government and the museum became a safe meeting place for members of the French Resistance. Jean Rouch screened his first film at the museum, after returning from his second trip to Niger in 1947. Michel Leiris liked the film and arranged for a screening at another multi-layered social venue: the Orienté, an avant-garde cinema club. In 1953, the museum became the meeting place and parent organization for the *Comité du Film Ethnographique*. See Paul Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot: The Ethnography of Jean Rouch* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992): 25-39; Rouch, “Film Ethnographique,” *Ethnologie Générale*, 459.

<sup>61</sup> See Donald Bender, “The Development of French Anthropology,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (1969): 139-151.

for a number of reasons. At first, they feared not being able to master the techniques. Second, there seemed to be an antinomy between cinema and scientific inquiry; in effect, cinema was synonymous with fiction, entertainment, and placing oneself on the aesthetic map [...] Experience eventually showed all of these complaints to be inexact [...] Far from creating obstacles to scientific inquiry, film offered it a new dimension and opened up a world of new possibilities.<sup>62</sup>

Although Rouch articulates these fears and grievances so as to seemingly assuage or refute them, to bring the mainstream anthropologists and filmmakers into the fold, he never really manages to do so. Ultimately, visual anthropologists were not proposing to work within the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology, nor bring ethnography in line with popular cinema. In this “new dimension,” they were proposing an altogether different ethnography, an altogether different cinema, and a collaboration that ethnographers rightly recognized as threatening to the entire discipline. At times, Rouch seems to revel in the possibility: “Neglected and rejected yesterday, might audiovisual techniques threaten to become the ‘miracle tool’ tomorrow, overturning the very foundations of the human sciences?”<sup>63</sup>

In 1954, Rouch left France for Ayorou, Niger to screen a film he had made in the same village several years before, *Chasse à l'hippopotame* (1950).<sup>64</sup> Audience members disapproved of the film, corrected errors, and suggested stylistic changes.<sup>65</sup> In this evening of exchange between filmmaker and film subjects, legend goes, the necessity of a participatory ethnographic cinema occurred to the young engineer from France. Rouch subsequently broke with the guidance of his mentors and began

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<sup>62</sup> Rouch, “Film Ethnographique,” *Ethnologie Générale*, 460.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 429.

<sup>64</sup> Also known as *Bataille sur le grand fleuve*. See Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot*, 42.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 43.



developing a more participatory, self-reflexive, and visually disjointed mode of cinema. Rouch layered the voices of initial film recordings with those of post-production commentators. He and his small, lightweight camera became as much a part of the film as the fishermen of Songhay. He asked questions, interrupted responses, and provoked actions. Documentary truth joined myth, storytelling, poetry, and unabashed fiction. Rouch understood this open and combinatory method as more faithful to the world he aimed to represent, to the multiple layers of image, sound, and human perspective that constitute it. In subsequent decades, his work has been termed experimental ethnography, *cinéma vérité*, ethno-fiction, and radical empiricism.

As Rouch's own description confirms, his films signify a considerable rupture with not only mainstream disciplinary anthropology, but also post-war ethnographic filmmaking. For many critics, Rouch achieved far more than a break with anthropology and the history of ethnographic cinema. He sounded their death knell. Anthropology and ethnographic cinema would never be the same. Paul Stoller argues that Rouch overturned the dominant, "plain style" of scientific inquiry, which he describes thusly:

In scholarly representation, the creation of order out of chaos is embodied in the Baconian notion of plain style. Plain style reduces the ambiguous contradictory nature of experience-in-the-world, replacing it with a transparent, unencumbered, clear language sapped of life [...] In plain style rhetorical flair is frowned upon and metaphors are out of bounds. In plain style narratives are suspect, for they reflect the contingent rather than reinforcing the certain. Plain style fills the pages of anthropological journals, monographs, and abstracts, which are supposed to be written in disinterested third person. Plain style also fills the frames of observational films. Plain style reduces the

complexity of the world to simple structures, principles, laws, axioms, all expressed in simple, bloodless sentences or numb, indifferent images [...] Plain style usually stands for scientific discourse.<sup>66</sup>

Rouch evokes and poeticizes, rather than reports or represents. His films question the value of scientific evidence, third-person detachment, and realistic representation. According to Stoller, “Rouchian” ethnography belongs to the broader field of postmodern thought and its reconsiderations of philosophical, scientific, and artistic meaning. In his study of postmodern ethnographies, Stephen Tyler describes the genre as, “a cooperative evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer the emergent possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect.”<sup>67</sup> This description resonates with Rouch’s cinema. However, save the intentional quality and therapeutic effect of a postmodern ethnography, it likewise describes myriad ethnographic films made by and beyond the prophets and precursors that Rouch ostensibly discards.

### *Insecure Worlds on Screens: Early Ethnographic Experiments*

In defining ethnographic cinema, both anthropologists and film scholars overlook the film image, as well as early film history. American anthropologists define ethnographic cinema as not written ethnography, while French anthropologists define the practice as a post-war phenomenon. For their part, film scholars define ethnographic cinema as an unwavering ideological force, rooted in the conventions of feature-length narrative cinema. This latter definition, closely entwined with a reductive understanding of *Nanook of the North*, undergirds the interpretation of *Las*

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Tyler, *The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987): 202.

*Hurdes* as an experimental overturning of ethnographic convention. The conflation of ideology and image obscures the essential or defining features of cinema, allowing for an easy slide between different forms of representation and an imprecise, even metaphorical, understanding of ethnographic cinema to emerge. We have not even begun to understand what the conventions of early ethnographic cinema might be and are thus in no position to accurately locate their experimental upheaval.

My dissertation takes this collection of voices as a point of departure. Early ethnographic cinema demands a new mode of reading, a new approach to its images. We need a mode of reading that searches beyond the canon of “legitimate” works and takes seriously the broad and inconsistent range of early ethnographic cinema. We need a mode of reading that acknowledges the ways in which nineteenth-century ethnographic practice fundamentally changes with the advent of cinema, not with Flaherty or Rouch or any one filmmaker or film. We need a mode of reading that studies the ideological foundations of visual ethnography, but also attends to the particularities of cinema and the ways in which ethnographic cinema represents ideology on-screen. By way of brief example: consider Bill Nichols’s suggestion that ethnographic cinema draws a line between “us” and “them.” In cinema, who is “us” and who is “them”? Does the filmmaker always so clearly distance himself from the subject? And, have the riddles of spectatorship been solved? Am I on the side of the filmmaker (assuming we can firmly fix his/her position)? The ensemble of filmmakers and ethnographers in the field? Or do I identify with the subject? And what of the original audience? Can we so easily assume hegemony among these spectators? These are complex questions with contested responses, even for mainstream narrative cinema. They require careful attention to the films, their methodologies, modes of address, social and historical contexts, etc.

How do we initiate this new mode of reading? When does ethnographic cinema begin and what films belong to this category? I am not interested in retracing anthropology's self-proclaimed history, or searching for the historically verifiable "first" moment that an anthropologist—itself a tenuous term—made a film. Nor am I interested in film studies' response, which while critical of anthropology's institutional boundaries, has remained quite faithful to its canon, never adequately surveying the archive of early ethnographic cinema. In articulating an initial response to these questions, I am guided in part by a handful of scholars who acknowledge the instabilities of anthropology at the turn-of-the century. Amy Staples notes that, "Until the institutionalization of ethnographic film at Harvard University and other sites [in the 1960s], the boundaries between travel film, expeditionary film, natural history film, and ethnographic film were rather undefined."<sup>68</sup> Anthropology overlapped with travel and tourism, colonialism and military operations, popular cinema and other forms of mass entertainment. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ethnographic cinema was made by "travelers and tourists, missionaries, colonial officers, expatriates, businessmen and safari hunters," and this cinema covered an array of genres, including "home movies, travelogues, expeditionary films, natural history films, anthropological films, and Hollywood documentaries."<sup>69</sup> Even the "official" anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers of the first-half of the twentieth century entered the field by circuitous paths. Robert Flaherty was a prospector for a railroad company. Paul Rivet was a veterinarian. Marcel Griaule sold cloth in Paris, went to flight school, and then studied literature. Claude Lévi-Strauss began as a philosopher. Franz Boas earned his doctorate in Physics and later studied geography. Jean Rouch trained as an engineer of roads and bridges.

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<sup>68</sup> Amy Staples, "The Last of the Great (Footslogging) Explorers: Lewis Cotlow and the Ethnographic Imaginary in Popular Travel Film," *Visual Anthropology* 15 (2002): 36.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

The work of anthropologist Malcolm Crick similarly blurs disciplinary boundaries. After being mistaken for a tourist on a trip to Sri Lanka, he asks, “What is the difference between being an anthropologist, being a tourist, and being an anthropologist studying tourism?”<sup>70</sup> Crick claims that the differences are negligible, inconsequential: “One of the reasons tourism has not become a matter for greater attention in anthropology is precisely because tourists are relatives of a kind; they act like a cracked mirror in which we can see something of the social system which produces anthropologists as well as tourists.”<sup>71</sup> A close analysis of tourism, or any number of “relatives of a kind,” furnishes a critique by proxy. In tourism, Crick locates a modern manifestation of exploration and imperialism, as well as a practice involving play, temporary residence, and exclusion. Although many anthropologists are quick to dismiss this potential relative as vulgar and unscientific, “when we look at the actual situation in the field, stark contrasts between tourists and anthropologists [...] are hard to draw.”<sup>72</sup> Crick destabilizes modern anthropology. He reveals its fluidity and insecurity. He holds up the “cracked mirror” of modern tourism so as to display not only the unseen or unacknowledged aspects of anthropological practice, but also the points of contact and overlap that anthropology shares with less serious, more vulgar cultural activities.

Writing at roughly the same period, James Clifford describes ethnography as a “hybrid activity [...] as writing, as collecting, as modernist collage, as imperial power, as subversive critique.”<sup>73</sup> His sweeping survey of twentieth-century ethnographic practice holds up one cracked mirror after another, and uncovers a number of distinct

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<sup>70</sup> Malcolm Crick, “‘Tracing’ the Anthropological Self: Quizzical Reflections on Field Work, Tourism, and the Ludic,” *Social Analysis* 15 (1985): 74.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 79. For an example of anthropologists’ response to Crick, see Errington and Gewertz,

“Tourism and Anthropology in a Postmodern World,” *Oceania* 60, no. 1 (1989): 37-54.

<sup>73</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 13.

and simultaneously circulating imaginaries. Some of these ethnographic collisions belong to conscious efforts to disrupt, reinvent, and combine, like those of the surrealist artists and writers of the 1920s and 1930s. Others reveal the difficulty of preventing cultural contamination, even in the sincerest of ethnographic efforts. Like Crick, Clifford brings modern American and European anthropology—its ideologies and written practices—into contact with a range of “relatives of a kind.” His understanding of ethnographic hybridity owes much to the technologies and changing geographies of the twentieth century. He writes:

This century has seen a drastic expansion of mobility, including tourism, migrant labor, immigration, urban sprawl. More and more people “dwell” with the help of mass transit, automobiles, airplanes. In cities on six continents foreign populations have come to stay—mixing in but often in partial, specific fashions. The “exotic” is uncannily close. Conversely, there seems no distant places left on the planet where the presence of “modern” products, media, and power cannot be felt. An older topography and experience of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighborhood, the familiar turns up at the end of the earth [...] “Cultural” difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness; self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence. A whole structure of expectations about authenticity in culture and in art is thrown in doubt.<sup>74</sup>

In Clifford’s twentieth century, we leave the firm ground of disciplines and language. We abandon clear distinctions between self and other. We lose “all reference to a

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

center, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *arche*.”<sup>75</sup> The pure products go crazy.<sup>76</sup> While Clifford offers only a skeletal theoretical road map, one does not have to strain to hear the echo of post-structuralism in his description. In the disintegration of purity, authenticity, and meaning, anthropology becomes *bricolage*. Crick makes the genealogy of his critique more explicit: “When semiology grew to grammatology [...], when the Saussurian legacy was scrutinized, we lost the logocentric metaphysics implicit in his work; we even lost the relative terra firma of signs standing ‘for’ something: instead, we gained a desubstantized signifying realm, without a center and without an ontology. This is an insecure world indeed.”<sup>77</sup>

The insecurities that Staples, Crick, and Clifford isolate are not simply the effects of a frenetic century, equally and indiscriminately distributed across all of its discourses and disciplines. Or, they are not only that. They are the foundation upon which ethnographic practice depends. Ethnography takes differences and divides (us and them, Europe and elsewhere, etc.) as first and essential conditions for inquiry and analysis. It establishes a coherent self, or a coherent structure, and then moves outside of it, beyond the center and the boundaries of the self-structure. Derrida thus grounds the first structural rupture in the discipline of ethnology, for it “could have been born as a science only at the moment when a decentering had come about: at the moment when European culture—and in consequence, the history of metaphysics and its concepts—had been dislocated, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference.”<sup>78</sup> Ethnography leaves the self for the Other, the safety and stability of the center for the unfamiliar outside, beyond.

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<sup>75</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1980): 286. I discuss this essay at length in Chapter Three.

<sup>76</sup> This phrase refers to the poem by William Carlos Williams with which Clifford introduces *The Predicament of Culture*.

<sup>77</sup> Crick, “‘Tracing’ the Anthropological Self,” *Social Analysis*, 73.

<sup>78</sup> Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” *Writing and Difference*, 282.

However, before semiology grew to grammatology, before the distinctions between self and other wholly collapsed, before any pathways through the twentieth century had been forged, ethnography encountered cinema. Early ethnographic cinema testifies to disciplinary uncertainty and ideological inconsistency well before Derrida addresses Lévi-Strauss. Early ethnographic cinema hastens the semiotic insecurities already underway, though not yet apparent. It contributes yet another order of displacement, decentering, and loss to a discipline founded upon displacements and decenterings. It demands a shift from linguistic signs to indexical images. It also demands very real geographic displacements: ethnographers were forced to leave the armchair for the field, the pen for the camera. Ethnographic cinema demands visible, verifiable differences. More than a cracked mirror, early ethnographic cinema offers a very clear reflection of what anthropology actually was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It projects an “insecure world” on-screen. The illegibility or instability of early ethnographic cinema owes not to the failures of untrained filmmakers or the primitivity of the earliest cinematic forms, but to the combined demands of ethnographic practice and visual reproduction. Cameras in hand, filmmakers went into the field to capture the non-self, the unfamiliar, and the faraway. An insecure world of infinite differences stretched out before their lenses. My dissertation traces these encounters.

In Chapter One, *Ciné Goes Abroad: La Maison Lumière, 1896-1903*, I explore the transition between late nineteenth-century ethnographic practice and single-shot expedition filmmaking. Mere months after the Lumière brothers debuted their *cinématographe*, they assembled a group of filmmakers, trained them, and harnessed them with the explicit task of making films in other countries, of other people. In effect, the inventors of one of the very first film cameras launched the first ethnographic filmmaking expedition. I examine a number of works frequently



occluded from the Lumière canon, including films shot in Africa and Mexico, as well as the *Village Ashantis* series. These films straddle the divide between the still photograph and the moving image, upsetting a number of claims about the narrative simplicity and visual exhibitionism of the Lumière archive. The Lumière expedition films oscillate between mummification and dynamism, between the present moment of projection, the past-presence of the ethnographic subject, and an imagined past of prehistory and primitivity. These films introduce a number of ontological, temporal, and narrative corollaries that shape ethnographic cinema over the next three decades and this chapter thus offers a roadmap for those that follow. I conclude with a reflection on the relationship between ethnographic discourse at the turn of the century and the contemporary categorization of early ethnographic cinema as a “primitive” practice.

Chapter Two, *Representing Difference and Vibrating with the Infinite: Ontology and Totality in ‘Les Archives de la Planète’*, considers the visual organization of an extraordinary ethnographic project developed and funded by Albert Kahn. Between 1908 and 1931, Kahn and his staff trained a rotating cast of operators in autochrome photography and 35-millimeter filmmaking. Together, Kahn imagined, these two forms of representation would render visible the totality of the planet. I examine the ontological implications of these simultaneous visual forms, including their respective roles and shared points of contact, as well as the very notion of “visual totality” underlying their union. I also consider a visual and theoretical divide between the archive’s “domestic” and “expedition” collections. Roughly half of the archive’s photographs and films represent France, while the other half represents an often unidentifiable other geography. In the domestic collection, the photographs capture motionless detail and the films capture moving subjects. In the expedition collection, the photographs and films bleed into one another, mimic each other, and

complicate any understanding of totality or visual knowledge. These geographic halves correspond to separate ways of seeing and signifying the world. The visual ontologies articulated by Roland Barthes, André Bazin, Philip Rosen, and Susan Sontag guide this discussion, as does the metaphysics of Henri Bergson, a close friend and philosophical mentor to Albert Kahn.

In Chapters Three and Four, I move beyond the hermetic “operator” archives to consider a broad swath of European and American ethnographic cinema. Chapter Three, *Other Times and Spaces: How Cinema Unmakes Anthropology’s Object*, revisits Edward Said’s and Johannes Fabian’s seminal critiques of written ethnographic practice. Said argues that written ethnography draws a line between the Occident and the Orient, the familiar “here” and the unfamiliar “over there.” This dividing line binds categories of qualitative difference and spatial distance together. That is to say, the Occident and the Orient signify vastly different kinds of things (people, rituals, myths, etc.) that belong to vastly different geographic locations. As Fabian understands it, ethnographic practice ties spatial distance to temporal difference. Despite the co-temporality or shared time of ethnographic observation, ethnographic writing inscribes its subject in the past, at the origin of evolutionary progress or an unspecified moment of primitivity. Early ethnographic cinema poses considerable challenges to written ethnographic practice, to the spatial and temporal divisions that separate the Western self from its unfamiliar subjects. In this chapter, I focus on two recurrent visual events or “sites” that exemplify the spatial and temporal complexities of early ethnographic cinema and emerge with startling frequency throughout the 1910s and 1920s: (1) the hunt and (2) dance. These particular sites demonstrate pre-historic and pre-modern time, but they also puncture otherwise unremarkable visual description with spatial uncertainty and temporal instability, haptic surfaces and incomprehensible events. I argue that early ethnographic cinema challenges the categories of spatial and temporal distance that undergird

ethnographic writing and its post-war upheaval. Rather than clear divisions between past and present time, prehistory and modernity, I locate multiple “times” that unfold within and across these visual sites, colliding with and contradicting the time-contingent medium of cinema itself.

My fourth and final chapter, *Native and Narration: Mixed Race and Hybrid Form* investigates the intersection of ethnographic documentary and narrative cinema in the late 1920s. Here, I do not return to *Nanook of the North* or the many Flaherty-inspired documentary films of the same era. Instead, I engage popular fiction films that embody the visual forms of early ethnographic cinema in subtle and intriguing ways. My critique focuses on two films. The first, *La Sirène des tropiques* (1927), stars Josephine Baker as Papitou, a Caribbean native who finds happiness and fame in Paris. The second, a little known film entitled *Yasmina* (1926), tells the story of a Tunisian princess, rescued by a dashing French doctor from her harem and husband. These films weave extensive documentary footage of exotic locales and “real” native subjects together with narratives of romance and thrilling adventure in far-flung corners of the world. Loose ends, complicated remainders, and visual detours abound. Moreover, both of these films feature mixed race women as central protagonists, romantically entangled with white leading men. Rather than mere reflections of colonial ideology and spectatorial desire, I read these figures as subversive precursors to Gilles Deleuze’s post-war *image-temps*. They guide viewers through unpredictable shifts in space and time, and frequently serve as the axes around which visual instabilities gather.

1  
CINÉ GOES ABROAD:  
*LA MAISON LUMIÈRE*, 1896-1903

In the spring of 1895, Louis Lumière began a tour of France and Belgium, showcasing a stunning new invention of visual reproduction: the *cinématographe*.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Edison's bulky *kinetoscope*, which was introduced to the United States roughly one year earlier, the Lumière camera was portable and hand-cranked. It could be taken out into the streets, anywhere in the world. More impressive still, the *cinématographe* was an all-in-one machine. It could record, develop, and project moving images. By the year's end, Louis and his brother, Auguste, had made nine *cinématographes*—as their short, single-shot films were called—including *Sortie d'usine (I)*, *Repas de bébé*, and *Arroseur et arrosé (I)*. These first images reflect the path of the Lumière brothers' promotional campaign. All of the films from 1895 depict life in France or Belgium.<sup>2</sup> In December, the Lumière brothers began to train *opérateurs*, including Joseph Camus, Charles Moisson, Alexandre Promio, Marius Sestier, and Gabriel Veyre.<sup>3</sup> The following year, the Lumière operators took over, demonstrating the features of the *cinématographe* in London, Rome, New York, Frankfurt, Geneva, Madrid, Moscow, Vienna, Budapest, Dresden, Venice, Mexico City, Berlioz, Melbourne, Guadalajara, Sydney, Algiers, Saigon, etc. The list continues and does not include the small French villages that received a visit in 1896. With every passing year, the Lumière brothers expanded their geographical scope. At each new location, the operators exhibited the machine and projected several films. They also recorded on site and added a considerable number of *vues* to the collection. Films made abroad were frequently

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Aubert and Jean-Claude Seguin, *La Production cinématographique des Frères Lumière* (Lyon: Bibliothèque du Film, 1996): 441-442.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 519-20.

<sup>3</sup> For a more precise chronology of the Lumière brothers' hiring and training of operators, as well as biographical information for each of the Lumière operators, see Aubert and Seguin, *La Production cinématographique*, 407-417.

screened in Paris or Lyon, but they could also surface in the very location in which they were originally filmed, as part of the Lumière program at the local cinema. Alternatively, they could première in an entirely different city on the Lumières' international map. When the operation ended in 1905, the Lumière archive contained more than 1400 films.

The first few months of this history contributed a considerable number of images to a still-potent mythology of early cinema. Spectators fleeing the theater and a train. Méliès noticing leaves in the breeze. Workers spilling out of a factory. Of the nine films recorded in 1895, all of them belong to the standard Lumière canon. They are among the most recognized of the entire collection, eclipsing roughly ten years of expedition filmmaking with quaint visions of Western labor and leisure. In this chapter, I interrogate a number of works frequently occluded from this canon, including films shot in Egypt, Africa, and Mexico, as well as *Le Village Ashantis* series, which was filmed at a colonial exposition in Lyon. I reframe the collection as part of a distinctly ethnographic genealogy, a visual extension of the nineteenth-century discourses and practices that sought to discover and study unfamiliar landscapes and bodies. These are not films that visual anthropologists in the United States and Europe include in their disciplinary histories, nor do they offer the kinds of visual taxidermy and narrative hermeticism that film scholars tend to associate with the ethnographic mode.<sup>4</sup> The expedition and exposition films in the Lumière archive nevertheless constitute a formative moment in the history of ethnographic cinema. These films reflect the state of anthropology and ethnographic practice in the late

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<sup>4</sup> For further reading on taxidermic ethnography, see Keith Beattie, "Men with Movie Cameras: Flaherty and Grierson," *Documentary Screens* (New York: Palgrave, 2004): 26-43; Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); William Rothman, "The Filmmaker as Hunter," *Documenting the Documentary*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998): 23-39. See also chapters three and four of this dissertation.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: a strange mix of science and entertainment, self-reflection and voyeurism, power and popular culture. The Lumière films render visible these discursive and disciplinary instabilities. They likewise bear the trace of an ambivalent and unsteady transition from written to visual ethnography, word to moving image. In these early film frames, a new form of visual reproduction, an unwieldy disciplinary and discursive field, and a ravenous search for visible difference come together. To reiterate the astute assessment of Malcolm Crick: This is an insecure world indeed.<sup>5</sup>

In foregrounding these films, this chapter likewise pushes against the established boundaries of early cinema scholarship. In recent decades, a small community of early film historians and theorists—chief among them, André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning—have labored to disentangle early cinema from the genealogy of American and European narrative film, commonly traced through histories of literature and theater. This collective recasts early cinema as a descendent of proto-cinematic toys, such as the magic lantern, and pre-cinematic mass entertainments like vaudeville, music hall, circuses, and panoramic displays. One finds evidence of this alternative heritage in the dramatic kernels, comedic gags, and simple exhibitionist pleasures that comprise much of the canon of early cinema and the Lumière catalogue. And yet, as I will argue, one must likewise recognize an ethnographic inheritance. Early cinema is often credited with collapsing geographic boundaries and producing an experience of virtual tourism. It brought images of the unfamiliar and the faraway to the neighborhood screen. However, in studying the Lumière films, one must wrestle with the knowledge that the very invention of the *cinématographe* coincided with a deliberate, well-planned, and extensive world tour.

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<sup>5</sup> I discuss Malcolm Crick in the introduction to this dissertation. See Crick, “‘Tracing’ the Anthropological Self: Quizzical Reflections on Field Work, Tourism, and the Ludic,” *Social Analysis* 15 (1985): 71-92.

The Lumière brothers did not make a few trips abroad and bring home a haphazard collection of films. They assembled a group of filmmakers, trained them, and harnessed them with the explicit task of making films in other countries, of other people. In effect, the Lumière brothers launched the very first ethnographic filmmaking expedition. In the pages that follow, I draw upon a number of early film scholars to outline the ways in which these films resist the traditional lexicon of “exhibitionism” and “attraction.” The Lumière expedition films straddle the divide between the still photograph and the moving image. They oscillate between mummification and dynamism, upsetting a number of claims about the visual and narrative simplicity of early cinema. The Lumière expedition films likewise introduce a number of ontological, temporal, and narrative corollaries that inflect ethnographic cinema over the next three decades. This chapter thus offers a roadmap for the central claims that shape this dissertation.

*Re-viewing Lumière: Narrativity, Monstration, Attraction, and Contingency*

In his seminal essay, “Structural Patterning in the Lumière Films,” Marshall Deutelbaum refutes the common claim that the Lumière films offer little more than “naively photographed views.”<sup>6</sup> He argues that a number of films, including *Sortie d’usine* (1895), reflect careful decisions about narrative structure. The film begins with the opening of the factory doors. The workers exit. The doors close and the film ends. The opening and shutting of the factory doors operate as a kind of structural punctuation. More intriguing, Deutelbaum contends, “is the way in which the film nearly returns the scene before the camera to the state at which it was when the film began.”<sup>7</sup> Deutelbaum insists that most Lumière films either exhibit the *Sortie d’usine* pattern or reveal structural decisions through visual repetition. In *Course en sacs*

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<sup>6</sup> Marshall Deutelbaum, “Structural Patterning in the Lumière Films,” *Wide Angle* 3, no. 1 (1979): 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

(1896), for example, two sets of contestants hop across the frame, one after the other. This arrangement of consecutive actions ensures that the frame is always filled with bodies and movements, rather than “dead” time and space. He further notes that no Lumière film begins in the middle of an action. Taking these patterns of visual organization together, Deutelbaum reads the Lumière archive as a collection of carefully choreographed, sometimes narrative actualities. For him, the Lumière brothers’ attention to spatial and structural concerns most forcefully coheres in *Arroseur et Arrosé*, a film often described as the first *vue* to tell a story. As Deutelbaum explains, “the event depicted is not discovered but created, not recorded but acted, the whole a unified design.”<sup>8</sup>

André Gaudreault tempers Deutelbaum’s enthusiasm for the structural sophistication of the Lumière films. For Gaudreault, all films can be positioned at some point along a wide spectrum of narrativity. All shots tell a story and, in a conventional narrative film, these shots combine to form a second level of narrativity, or a “macro-narrative.” Gaudreault explains that “the second level can only operate by tending to cover up the first: spectators are not aware of watching a huge number of micro-narratives being linked together.”<sup>9</sup> Considered in this way, the single-shot Lumière films can only ever represent a “micro-narrative” structure. Narrative coherence be damned, these films consist of just one shot. To this “micro” and “macro” division, Gaudreault adds a parallel set of terms. The Lumière films “monstrate,” as opposed to “narrate.” Gaudreault argues that before 1901, “the great majority [of films] consisted of a single shot and they usually aspired to nothing beyond visual pleasure: the stories were of restricted scope and could be read as much through topological parameters as through chronological ones. So all spectators had to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>9</sup> André Gaudreault, “Film, Narrative, Narration: The Cinema of the Lumière Brothers,” *Early Cinema*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990): 72.



do was to see, to look, something for which they had no need of a lecturer-adjutant.”<sup>10</sup> Without secrets or suspense, without lecturers or intertitles, the very earliest cinematic visions extended the visual pleasures of the fairground and the vaudeville stage to the cinematic screen. Spectators needed only to open their eyes and enjoy. While Gaudreault acknowledges that these films communicate something, and even goes so far as to categorize this “something” as a form of narrativity, the distinction he makes between monstration and narration seems to articulate an irreparable division between single-shot and multi-shot filmmaking. As much as Deutelbaum would like to reclaim Lumière through its narrative structure, Gaudreault insists upon the difference between *Arrosé et Arroseur* and the multi-shot structure of Edwin S. Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), to take but one possible example.

Tom Gunning expands Gaudreault’s notion of monstration and similarly reframes early cinema as something other than the primitive predecessor to coherent narrativity. In the work of both Lumière and Méliès, he locates the “cinema of attractions.” This cinema, Gunning writes, “bases itself on the quality that Léger celebrated: its ability to *show* something. Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema analyzed by Christian Metz, this is an exhibitionist cinema.”<sup>11</sup> The cinema of attractions creates a space of simple exchange. It solicits the interest of spectators and satisfies those interests with a vibrant display of visual curiosities. As Gunning describes it, “the energy moved outward toward the spectator, rather than inwards toward character-based situations.”<sup>12</sup> Like Gaudreault, Gunning separates early cinema from the tradition of literature and theater, noting that most films were screened in vaudeville houses and music halls until 1905. But Gunning goes further

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<sup>10</sup> Gaudreault, “Showing and Telling: Image and Word in Early Cinema,” *Early Cinema*, 277.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,” *Early Cinema*, 57.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

than Gaudreault. Early cinema, he argues, did not fail at more complex narrative forms, nor did it provide the foundation for commercial narrative filmmaking. It was not a primitive form searching for civility and slowly making its way, with each new film bringing the medium one step closer to narrative enlightenment. Rather, early cinema was something altogether different. For Gunning, it carved paths to nowhere, as well as paths to the avant-garde.<sup>13</sup>

Despite their significant contributions to Lumière scholarship, Deutelbaum, Gaudreault, and Gunning address a very limited number of films: the previously mentioned *Sortie d'usine* and *Arroseur et arrosé* as well as *Démolition d'un mur* (1896), *Défournage du coke* (1896), *Arrivée d'un train à la Ciotat* (1897), *Partie de cartes* (1897), and *Barque sortant du port* (1897). Within the context of this narrow selection, Deutelbaum's argument seems well supported. Films like *Sortie d'usine* and *Arroseur et arrosé* represent tightly choreographed events, with perceptible beginnings and conclusions. But if one examines the entire archive, the majority of the Lumière films simply do not cohere in the way he suggests. This is not to say that these films do not "mean" or that they do not narrate something. As Gunning might argue, they simply do not carve a path toward the future of mainstream narrative film. In much the same way, Gaudreault's division between micro- and macro-narrativity fails to capture the breadth of the collection. In his reading, single-shot cinema appears incapable of sustaining the extended inquiry of film scholars. The macro-narrative structure implies a complex covering up, a concealing of separate parts, whereas the single-shot narrative conceals nothing. It opens itself up and spills its contents at the feet of the viewer. And while Gunning's assertion regarding alternative paths through film history is provocative, he assigns the entire Lumière

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<sup>13</sup> See Gunning, "An Unseen Energy Swallows Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film," *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John L. Fell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983): 366.

archive to a single “ciné-genre” and shifts his reading of pre-1907 filmmaking to the ostensibly less-hegemonic multi-shot films.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Gunning would seem to suggest that all of the Lumière films mean in the same way and follow the same path through film history. He does, however, acknowledge the oversight, implicit in his categories: “The sort of cinematic form given to these early actualities needs to be examined more closely in relation to the fictional genres I have discussed.”<sup>15</sup>

If one looks beyond the films that conventionally reinforce arguments about early cinema and narrative meaning, a dense and complicated ground reveals itself. The single-shot form of the Lumière films does not exclude the possibility of simultaneous, manifold, and contradictory narratives inhabiting the same frame and the same uninterrupted sequence of film. These narratives do not resemble those identified by Deutelbaum, nor do they attain the structural complexity of Gaudreault’s macro-narrative. Gaudreault’s term, “micro-narrative,” perhaps most accurately captures the small strands of communication and meaning to which I refer. However, these micro-narratives do not combine to form a coherent macro-narrative. They do not move horizontally, with each new shot replacing and effacing the last. They gather in a single shot, a single film. One can best imagine them vertically stacked, one upon the other, with each micro-narrative present and communicating at the same time. In their multiplicity, these micro-narratives conflict with one another, with the voyeuristic desires of the audience, and with the easy exhibitionism circumscribed by Gaudreault’s and Gunning’s terms. I do not refute the historical and interpretive import of monstration and attraction. A number of early films satisfy their criteria. However, I would like to take seriously Gunning’s call for analyses of early

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<sup>14</sup> See Gunning, “The Non-Continuous Style of Early Film, 1900-1906,” *Cinema, 1900-1906: An Analytical Study* (Brussels: FIAF, 1982): 181-200.

<sup>15</sup> Gunning, “Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity: A Theory of Genres in Early Films,” *Early Cinema*, 93.

actualities. In doing so, the canon of early cinema expands. The concepts of monstration and attraction must either expand with them or make way for a conceptual lexicon that addresses the range of images that subsequently come into view.

Beyond questions of narrativity, the single-shot form of the Lumière films has influenced a rich discussion of contingency and temporality in early cinema. Cinema reorganized one's experience of space and time. The past could return in the present. Events could be slowed down, sped up, repeated, and rearranged. A day could unfold in a few seconds, minutes, or hours. More importantly, the earliest, single-shot films represented space and time in a radically different way than its narrative, post-1907 counterpart. Recalling his first viewing of *Barque sortant du port*, Dai Vaughn describes a sense of spontaneity and unbound possibility. He writes, "The movements of photographed people were accepted without demur because they were perceived as performance, as simply a new mode of self-projection, but that the inanimate should participate in self-projection was astonishing."<sup>16</sup> In the film to which he refers, two men in a small boat row out of the harbor. Just before the film concludes and the boat exits the frame, a wave crashes, pushing the boat and its passengers back into view. In this moment of collision, Vaughn explains, human subject and inanimate object coincide, equally exposed to external forces. Anything could happen and these unexpected shocks could very well be captured on film. *Barque sortant du port* threatens the idea of "controlled, willed, and obedient communication."<sup>17</sup> With this revelation, the individuals represented on-screen could no longer be dismissed as participants in a well-planned performance and the operator could no longer be defined as the sole executor of the image. No other form of representation could

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<sup>16</sup> Dai Vaughn, "Let There Be Lumière," *Early Cinema*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

escape the control of its creators in such a way. Cinema was thus perceived as a thing apart, distinct from all other forms of mass entertainment and artistic production.

In her fascinating and more recent study of cinematic time, Mary Ann Doane returns to Vaughn's reading of *Barque sortant du port*. For Doane, the crash of ocean waves against the boat communicates more than the spontaneity of single-shot filmmaking. It confirms an intimate link between the *vue* and contingency. Nothing stands between the uninterrupted duration of single-shot filmmaking and the unexpected threats of the natural world. Doane explains that the anxiety provoked by *Barque sortant du port* "would be that of sheer undivided extension, of a 'real time' without significant moments, of a confusion about where or why to look. If everything is recordable, nothing matters except the act of recording itself."<sup>18</sup> The shift from early forms of cinematic representation to narrative cinema signaled a necessary shift away from the impossible archive of "real time." Narrative cinema makes time legible and the archive manageable. It brings the inevitable visual contingencies of any-instant-whatever under control. In transitioning to narrativity, cinema likewise ceases to record time in its unbound fullness. Instead, cinema produces "time as an effect" and as necessary illusion. The division that Doane draws between the uncontrollable time of early cinema and the time "effects" of narrative cinema echoes Gaudreault's division between micro- and macro-narrativity. The micro-narrative conceals nothing and potentially means nothing. The macro-narrative conceals the gaps in time and between its shots, but manages to banish contingency and control narrative sense.

While early cinema issues the threat of contingency more easily than multi-shot narrative film, not all early films pose this threat in the same way and with the

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002): 66.

same force. In articulating the temporality of single-shot cinema, Doane flattens the tremendous variation of the Lumière archive. She argues, “Although the placement of the camera may be precisely calculated and the recorded activities foreseen or tightly regulated, these films depend on the fascination with the camera’s ability to ‘catch’ moments.”<sup>19</sup> For Doane, the single-shot form determines the content of these films. Her reading thus necessarily extends indiscriminately across the entire collection of Lumière *vues*. She writes, “All the Lumières can do is multiply the number of such moments, seemingly indefinitely, and produce a series of catalogues containing 1428 films, dividing the films (*vues*) into such categories as ‘*vues militaires*,’ ‘*vues comiques*,’ ‘*vues diverses*.’ Theoretically, the topics are inexhaustible.”<sup>20</sup> Doane’s description gives the appearance of an uncontrollable and chaotic archive. However, the collection does not cover as wide a range of human experience and potential contingencies as one might imagine. For example, 408 films in the Lumière collection are *vues militaires*. Almost every military *vue* is structured as Deutelbaum describes. The beginning of the film coincides with the beginning of an action and the end marks its successful completion. The content of these films includes strictly organized maneuvers and parades. Individual bodies merge to become part of an elaborate and singular design. Constituting roughly a quarter of the entire catalogue, these films showcase France’s military machine alongside its cinematic one. They also strategically minimize the possibility of spontaneous or unexpected disruptions.

The content of the Lumière films matter. It influences their form and, in turn, meaning. As many acknowledge, *Sortie d’usine* and *Arroseur et arrosé* are stable films which reflect an effort to organize space and time in a coherent and comprehensible way. Although the sudden burst from the gardener’s hose or the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 178.

workers' exit from the doors of a factory may have come as a shock to the films' first audiences, the actions in these films do not threaten the archive with too much "real time," a sense of any-instant-whatever, or utter illegibility. Nor do these films present the simultaneous strands of communication—"micro-narratives," for lack of a better term—to which I earlier referred. If one examines the Lumière catalogue carefully, one finds that it does not issue the threat of contingency, incoherence, or "too much" signification consistently, across all of its films. Those films that seem most capable of giving way to the spontaneous and unexpected, those that produce anxiety and issue threats, those that gather conflicting and multi-layered micro-narrative threads emerge out of the Lumière operators' global expeditions and the bizarre space of the Ashantis exposition—the very films that are excluded from the Lumière canon and early film scholarship. However, these films are not guided by a simple search for any-instant-whatever. With the inflexibility and imprecision of the single-shot structure, they search for very particular bodies and very particular landscapes.

*Photographic Cinema and Heterotopic Disruptions: Le Village Ashantis, 1897*

On April 18, 1897, the *Lyon Républicain* announced the arrival of a new spectacle. A French diplomat had brought a group of Africans from the Gold Coast to the city. The Ashantis tribe would stay in Lyon for four months, performing "native life" for the local Lyonnais. With startling clarity, the announcement outlines the underlying desires and fears that meet upon the complicated ground of this public display. It describes the Ashantis as a beautiful "type," noting the quality of their skin tone, while simultaneously acknowledging fears of filth and contamination, impropriety and criminality:

The inauguration of the black village took place yesterday afternoon, on the central courtyard, next to the Rhône. The two hundred blacks

that M. Gravier has brought to Lyon are from the Ashantis province of the Gold Coast, a British possession. They are, for the most part, of a beautiful type. Their skin is more bronze than black. All are barefoot. All ages are represented. None of the Ashantis express themselves in French. They only speak their native tongue, the “Ga” dialect. The tribe’s chief is a robust fellow in his forties with an air of intelligence; he responds to the name of Botchey. His wife, who is one of the most beautiful women in the tribe, is twenty-three. Her name is Akossia. Clothes embroidered with gold and special jewelry distinguish them from their fellow tribesmen. The men practice the most diverse trades. Some are jewelry-makers, others blacksmiths, and still others sculptors, weavers, basket-makers, launderers. The women busy themselves with the children and cooking. Some of them make music, singing and tapping their arms against the tambourines as accompaniment to the dances of a fetisher, whose face is painted white. A distinctive quality: none beg. Morality reigns as much as cleanliness in the village. Moreover, their chief requires them to wash at least two times a day. Families can venture to the negro-village, without risk of finding themselves in the presence of spectacles that offend them.<sup>21</sup>

Like so much late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographic writing, the *Républicain* describes the Ashantis as a people without language (or history, archives, etc.). In noting their colonization by the British, their primitive shoelessness, and the dances they perform, the announcement establishes a firm divide between the Lyonnais and their African visitors. However, the *Républicain* also establishes points

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<sup>21</sup> *Lyon Républicain* (Lyon: April 18, 1897). Unless otherwise noted, all cited excerpts from the *Républicain* are my translation.



of contact and similarity between the two communities. The men practice skilled trades, the women cook and care for the children. They have a leader whose marriage reflects those of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western culture. They have names. There is a kind of tug-of-war in this description. They are like us, but they are not like us. They are good and kind, but also to be feared. The announcement signals the very insecurities that, in part, shape the content and composition of the Ashantis film series.

Between opening day and May 17th, the Lumière operators made fourteen films of the exposition. Here, I will focus my reading on *Danse du sabre I*, *Danse du sabre II*, and *Danse du féticheur*. The operators structured each of the films in the series around a single activity (e.g. a parade, a dance, a household chore, etc.) and the titles that they selected buttress these efforts to circumscribe the content. The description that accompanied the Ashantis films to theaters likewise confirms a certain faith in the union between word and image. It reads, “This *vue* was taken during the Ashantis village exposition, located in Lyon. The title is sufficiently explanatory.”<sup>22</sup> No need for further description, the title says it all. Nevermind that viewers of these films were largely European and that the terms “sword dance” and “fetisher” would have conjured little more than gauzy fantasy. The titles fail to describe the most basic feature of cinema: movement in time, over time. Instead, they work in conjunction with the supplementary descriptions to imbue the images with a manageable stillness. In viewing the Ashantis films, one encounters a distinct incongruity between the simplicity and stillness of the films’ descriptions and the complexity that materializes on screen.

Each of the films I will consider represents the dancing bodies of Ashantis tribespeople. Dance was one of the first and most frequently represented activities in

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<sup>22</sup> Aubert and Seguin, *La Production cinématographique*, 175-179.

the pre-narrative film genres. It constitutes a large portion of the Edison, Lumière, Méliès, and Pathé catalogues, though each production company represented this order of motion differently. Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge also made dancing bodies the subject of a number of their motion studies. In the transition from Muybridge's and Marey's proto-cinematic images of the dancing body to the dancing body in cinematic motion, one can perceive a celebration of the body set free by cinema. Muybridge's still photographs taken in quick succession and Marey's abstract compositions of infinitely divide-able time are replaced with the single-shot, long take of cinema. At the same time, the enormous popularity of dance in early film betrays a desire for visual predictability. In perhaps some of the earliest writings on dance, the Stoics recognized its structural qualities.<sup>23</sup> They argued that dance embodies its own ends. The dancer does not move toward another goal or serve another purpose. The moving body is the end, a self-contained and self-sustained activity. If we consider the Stoic description alongside the repetitive styles of dance that frequently surface in early film, one can begin to understand the ways in which dance potentially staves off the threat of contingency. Dance showcases the movements of the body and cinema's remarkable capacity to represent those movements, while simultaneously bringing the possibilities of motion and movement under control.<sup>24</sup>

As Jane Desmond argues, the dancing body also serves as a locus of desire and sexual performance. She explains, "How one moves, and how one moves in relation

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<sup>23</sup> See Cicero, *De finibus*, 3.24: "In fact we do not consider Wisdom to be like seamanship or medicine, but rather like the arts of acting and of dancing just mentioned; its end, being the actual exercise of the art, is contained within the art itself, and is not something extraneous to it."

<sup>24</sup> The American musical provides a nice example of this tension between abandon and control, spontaneity and structure in representations of dance. This genre incorporates dance so as to deliver a highly coded and controlled system of conflicts and resolutions, separations and (hetero-normative) unions. For a detailed discussion of dance in the Hollywood musical see Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

to others, constitutes a public enactment of sexuality and gender. This is true whether we are considering Nijinsky's leaps or dancing at the local bar."<sup>25</sup> The representation of an ethnographic dance, of the Other body in motion, further complicates these already complex layers of meaning and cultural reception. The dancing body of early ethnographic cinema is a dangerous curiosity, at once a sign of sexual, racial, and cultural difference. Any sensation of excitement or anxiety emanates not only from the liberatory qualities of the cinematic medium or the unimpeded vision of a writhing form, but also from the impossible knot of desire and fear provoked by this hyperbolic display of otherness. And yet, early ethnographic cinema reiterates the divide that emerges elsewhere in the early archive of dance. It entertains an interminable tension between, on the one hand, the fluidity and volatility of unbridled gesture, and, on the other hand, the repetition and stability of well-choreographed patterns. Performances of ethnographic dance are often highly structured events. The movements are shaped by history and repetition into coherent and predictable forms. The cinematic representation of the ethnographic dance thus indulges the desire to see the "wild" and "savage" native, the frenzy of movement that cinema can provide, while, at the same time, putting certain limitations in place. It is perhaps no startling revelation that of the fourteen films made in the Ashantis village, six represent dance and a seventh captures an equally structured activity: a ceremonial parade.

The popularity of dance in ethnographic cinema also derives from its status as a rite or ritual. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim makes a critical distinction between beliefs and rites: "Religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are particular modes of action. Between these two

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<sup>25</sup> See Jane Desmond, *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001): 6.

categories of phenomena lies all that separates thinking from doing.”<sup>26</sup> In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographic writing, the actions and beliefs of the ethnographic subject become intimately linked. In the absence of shared languages and texts, ethnographers treat rites and rituals as the means by which to access their subjects’ thoughts, cultural values, etc. For example, in *The Mind of Primitive Man*, published in 1911, Franz Boas suggests that nearly every action of primitive culture is tied to a second level of meaning:

In our day, the domain of ritual is restricted, but in primitive culture it pervades the whole of life. Not a single action of any importance can be performed that is not accompanied by proscribed rites of more or less elaborate form. It has been proven in many cases that rites are more stable than their explanations; that they symbolize different ideas among different people and at different times. The diversity of rites is so great and their occurrence so universal, that here the greatest possible associations is found.<sup>27</sup>

Boas describes an impossible ethnographic problem: every action becomes a symbol, every movement a sign. Each ethnographic encounter thus becomes a never-ending process of deciphering and translation wherein nothing is as it appears. More recently, cultural anthropologists like Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz interpret performative actions like dance as “thick signs.” Expanding upon Boas’s claim that the meaning of a rite shifts and changes across different cultural contexts, Turner and Geertz argue that a rite can mean many and multiple things within a single community. For Turner, each rite or ritual consists of symbolic “storage units.” Symbols can be objects,

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<sup>26</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995): 34.

<sup>27</sup> Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1911): 229-230.

activities, words, relationships, events, or gestures.<sup>28</sup> Each symbol reveals cultural, social, and religious values and meanings. This infinite expansion of interpretive possibilities similarly influences Clifford Geertz's ethnography of the Balinese cockfight and his theorization of "deep play." In the cockfight, every gesture and object means in multiple ways, up and down the Balinese social hierarchy. Geertz describes an impossibly tangled constellation of thematic associations: "Drawing on almost every level of Balinese experience, [the cockfight] brings together themes—animal savagery, male narcissism, opponent gambling, status rivalry, mass excitement, blood sacrifice—whose main connection is their involvement with rage and the fear of rage, and, binding them into a set of rules which at once contains them and allows them play, builds a symbolic structure in which, over and again, the reality of their inner affiliation can be intelligibly felt."<sup>29</sup>

Composed of rules and play, structure and performance, ethnographic dance intersects with the Balinese cockfight, as well as the broader ethnographic categories of rites and rituals in a number of fascinating ways. Dance creates a "symbolic structure," exceeding the sum of its parts, the shape of its gestures. To return to Desmond, she argues that dance is "so ubiquitous, so 'naturalized' as to be nearly unnoticed as a symbolic system."<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, she contends that, "movement is a primary, not a secondary social 'text.'"<sup>31</sup> Following Geertz's methodology, Deidre Sklar offers a more explicitly ethnographic take on the dance event:

To examine dance from the ethnographic perspective, then, is to focus on dance as a kind of cultural knowledge. Dance ethnography depends

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<sup>28</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967): 1-19.

<sup>29</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 453.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Desmond, "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies," *Cultural Critique* 26 (Winter 1993-1994): 36.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

upon the postulate that cultural knowledge is embodied in movement, especially the highly stylized and codified movement we call dance. This statement implies that the knowledge involved in dancing is not just somatic, but mental and emotional as well, encompassing cultural history, beliefs, values, and feelings.<sup>32</sup>

While turn-of-the-century ethnographers lacked the generous interpretive frameworks of “thick description” and “deep play,” they nevertheless included dance among the kinds of cultural actions that demanded careful reading and interpretation.

Ethnographic cinema made the dancing body into a kind of visual, scrutable text. If ethnographic subjects used their bodies to speak, cinema made that message more clear.

As Boas describes them, rites and rituals are also visually stable forms. They refer to repeatable and endlessly repeated actions or series of actions. It perhaps follows, then, that the representation of ritual dance could further tame the cinematic image, limiting the possibility of the unexpected or the stray. This visual stability could likewise challenge the indexical claims of actuality filmmaking. A film depicting a ritual dance would not represent that ritual on a particular day, at a particular time, upon a particular patch of ground, with living or once-living individuals. The Lumière films would not offer a sword dance, but *the* sword dance of the Ashantis community. The sword dance would not be filmed on a sunny April day in 1897. The event would transcend time, would be suspended outside the flow of cinematic time. Further, the dance would not unfold in the Ashantis village in Lyon, but would take place in an imagined African playland. And yet, early actuality cinema does not give way to spatial, temporal, and indexical uncertainty so easily. In the case of the Lumière actualities, or any actuality, their status *as actuality* depends upon the

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<sup>32</sup> Deidre Sklar, “On Dance Ethnography,” *Dance Research Journal* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 6.

indexical guarantees of cinematic representation. These conditions are represented in tandem with the actual content of the images. Put another way, the single-shot format of the Lumière actualities does not create “time as an effect” or signify indeterminate or illusory space. Rather, its uninterrupted reel of film signifies real time and real bodies, recorded at some moment in the past. This tension between rituality and indexicality circumscribes the whole of the Ashantis series.

All of the Ashantis dance films share in the same basic visual composition. The operator(s) placed the immobile *cinématographe* directly in front of their dancing subjects. This camera position “flattens” the image and recreates the conditions of a theatrical space, with the ideal viewing position reserved for the camera and future spectators. This technique was used in Edison’s early stage films as well as his later fictional shorts. Méliès’s trick films also relied upon the convention. Even after the arrival of the multi-shot chase film, and more dynamic visual and narrative structures, directors continued to film interior sequences with a simple, frontally positioned camera well into the second decade of the twentieth-century. Though it had yet to become such a firmly fixed convention in 1897, the camera position in the Ashantis films nevertheless signals “performance.” It alerts viewers to the conditions of spectacle and spectatorship. This position likewise attempts to neutralize any visual distractions in the frame, directing our gaze toward the well-centered dancers. We are invited to assume the position of the many Lyonnais visitors to the Ashantis exposition, to watch the fascinating spectacle of bodies in motion.

Despite these efforts to stabilize the image, direct our gaze, and deliver an unobstructed view of dancing bodies, the visual composition of the Ashantis dance films is divided between stillness and movement. In both *Danse du sabre* films, two men dance together with swords. In *Danse du féticheur*, a man dances alone. In each of these films, a large group of Ashantis tribesmen and women stands behind the

dancers, encircling them and establishing a visual divide between foreground and background, dancing and stillness.<sup>33</sup> While one man sits and plays the drums, the majority of this collective stands and stares directly into the camera. Juxtaposed against the twirling movements of the dancers' bodies, the films present motionless photographic portraits. Within the Lumière collection, this particular visual composition emerges only in films representing "exotic" others in performative motion. Whether by influence of Lumière alone, or that of ethnographic photography, this composition—centered foreground of movement, still portraiture of background individuals—will become a standard of ethnographic cinema. But what is one to make of this ontological combination, of photographic stillness and cinematic motion in the same film frame? These sequences are surely not photographs. Nor do they wholly embrace the possibilities of cinema.

Aligning herself with a particular reading of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, Fatimah Tobing Rony contrasts the photographic with the cinematic image. She concludes that cinema lends itself to a greater degree of ideological control and, in the case of ethnographic film, a more oppressive encounter between the filmmaker/spectator and ethnographic subject. Alternatively, the photograph escapes the control of the photographer. The encounter between spectator and photographic image allows for the potential disruption of realism, with the small, unintended, and subjectively determined *punctum* leading the way. Not so, she claims, with the cinematic image.<sup>34</sup> Following Rony, one might conclude that the encounter between the photographic and the cinematic releases the ethnographic content from the control

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<sup>33</sup> This divided structure appears in almost all of the Ashantis films, including *Toilette d'un Négrillon I* and *Toilette d'un Négrillon II*, in which a woman who washes her child in the center of the frame, in close-up, is flanked by a group of women, staring directly into the camera.

<sup>34</sup> See Rony, *The Third Eye*, 3-20. The *punctum* refers to the unexpected, shocking, or personal detail of the photographic image that captivates the viewer. It pierces the intended (cultural, historical, political, etc.) message of the photograph. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).



of cinema's uninterrupted flow. The immobilization of cinema by a still shot or a photographic image could perhaps allow for a more subjective encounter between spectator and subject. In other words, the divided frame of the Ashantis series could potentially open the cinematic image to the disruptive and subjective possibilities of the *punctum*.

However, in reading the Ashantis films' ontological mixture, one must also consider the equally important historical and theoretical link between photography and mortality. This link guides a number of analyses of ethnographic photography, as well as Barthes's own understanding of the photographic image. He writes, "The person or thing photographed is the target [...] which I should like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph, because this word retains [...] a relation to the 'spectacle' and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead."<sup>35</sup> The photograph guarantees that *ça a été* (this was, or this has been). It encourages a faith in the contents of the image as real and of this world. And yet, Barthes argues, the intrusion of photography's temporal dimension—the simple past tense of "*ça*"—almost always and immediately ruptures this faith. It imposes temporal limits upon the photographic guarantee. What once was may be no more. The photograph can only make promises about past presences. If we extend Barthes's reading of the photographic *ça a été* with all of its deadly implications, to ethnographic photography, the binary that Rony proposes becomes more complicated. The ontological particularities of photography make it an equally powerful and potentially threatening instrument.

Moreover, many critics and scholars, including Susan Sontag, have noted the curiously violent vocabulary associated with photographic practice (to shoot, to capture, etc.). Ethnographic photography is often interpreted within this context of

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<sup>35</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 9.

violence. The photographic image not only captures the ethnographic subject, immobilizing and confining its form, but also relegates the ethnographic subject to the past, to that which has been but is no longer. As a popular and scientific practice, ethnographic photography effectively inscribes the image of the Ethnographic with death. One should also not overlook the object-ness of the photograph, a quality that no doubt transfers to the subject of its image. Photographs circulate freely and easily. They are collected, accumulated, and shared. But, one does not collect photographs, per se. As Sontag argues, “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed.”<sup>36</sup> Barthes’s “ça” does not refer to the literal sliver of photographic paper, but to the image contained thereupon. While the liberation of the photograph from the hands of its creator might very well guarantee a more generous encounter between viewer and image, ethnographic photographs provided a means by which the photographic subject could be appropriated, inspected, measured, analyzed, etc. The ethnographic photograph allowed conclusions to be drawn and discourses to be spun around and upon the body of the Other, with no need for an actual encounter with a living human being. In photographic form, the ethnographic subject exists in the past, in the moment of photographic capture. The photograph is conveniently still and silent.

One of the few theorists to straddle the divide between photography and film, André Bazin, interprets the photographic image as “the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny.”<sup>37</sup> For Bazin, the photograph preserves its subjects, but only as formaldehyde-laden specimens: photography mummifies. The advent of cinema insured that “for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it

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<sup>36</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977): 4.

<sup>37</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume I*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967): 14.

were.”<sup>38</sup> While Bazin hints at a kind of mummified zombie-cinema, the moving image escapes its photographic origins, thanks in large part to the complicity of the viewer. Indeed, the link between photography and film dissolves on screen, in the theater. Cinema manages to communicate presence and realism because the audience “needs to believe in the reality of what is happening while knowing it to be tricked.”<sup>39</sup> Bazin counts himself among those spectators who readily efface or ignore cinema’s photographic substratum. His film theory privileges cinema above all other forms of representation. The moving image faithfully reproduces reality and life.

In his careful reading of Bazin, Philip Rosen notes that the privileged correspondence between cinema and reality depends upon “a subjective intentionality for automatically produced images based on a preservative obsession.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, cinema acquires indexical credibility because spectators, obsessed with preservation and fearful of death, believe it to be so, rather than because cinema maintains an unprecedented or existential bond with either the objects it aims to represent or lived experience. In this centrality of subjectivity, Rosen locates a fundamental paradox. He explains:

On the one hand, automatically produced images fundamentally appeal to a desire that the concrete be preserved, stopped in time as reality. This desire leads to the special attraction and epistemological possibilities of cinema, insofar as it can move the subject toward opening itself to a revelatory experience of reality. But, on the other hand, reality itself evolves in time, and is perceived in the flow of time,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 15, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2001): 23.

which means that reality in some sense goes against that which motivates the desire to engage it.<sup>41</sup>

The experience of reality that cinema invites spectators to consume deviates from reality in several fundamental and necessary ways. For Bazin, cinema offers an experience of flexible, endlessly repeatable, and preservable time. It represents reality extracted from the inevitable flow toward the future and death. Cinema serves the obsession to preserve reality and experience a revelatory reality, rather than reality itself. In order to accept the film image as reality, one must deny, disavow, ignore, or, to adopt Rosen's term, sublimate: "The desire to master reality is activated yet somehow sublimated, so that the self-protective mechanisms motivating the projection toward the real are diverted from their defensive stance."<sup>42</sup> We demand these images, create these images, and insist upon their natural correspondence with the world. However, this act of sublimation is tenuous and fleeting. As Bazin himself points out, the slightest photographic provocation reminds us of the preservation underway and the reality that continues uninterrupted, outside.

The Ashantis village dance films are not exactly the exquisite long takes of neo-realist cinema that Bazin had in mind when outlining his ontology. Nor, as I've previously mentioned, can the photographic aspect of these films be treated as a traditional ethnographic portrait. Nevertheless, the expedition films overlap with both modes of visual reproduction. At the turn-of-the-century, ethnographic cinema anticipates both the preservative and realist obsessions that guide Bazin. One need only chart the Lumière operators' frenzied race across the globe to discern the preservative ends that cinema was made to serve. At the same time, the Lumière films were touted as an indulgent experience of real places and times. These claims to

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

realism perhaps were heightened by the experience of uninterrupted single-shot filmmaking, as well as the immediate viewing experiences that the *cinématographe* made possible. And yet, the Ashantis films plainly display the preservative qualities of cinema. They contain a kind of lingering photographic residue or mummified layer, which inflects and influences the cinematic image, at the same time that the cinematic image inflects and influences the photographic features in the frame. Of course, the Lumière films are still *films*. They are not slips of paper that can be collected, tucked in one's pocket, or rearranged alongside other images. They are continuous strips of celluloid, meant to be projected on screen, in a theater, with an audience. In the Ashantis dance films the photograph gains duration. It becomes stillness and immobility *over time*. The spectral qualities of the photographic image and the perpetual past tense of the photographic subject are countered by both the persistence of these motionless bodies over time and the continuous movement of the dancers. Correspondingly, the stillness of the surrounding crowd punctures the continuous movements of the dancers and the films' uninterrupted flow. Death hovers just beyond these vibrations.

With these contradictions in mind, one can begin to understand the ways in which concepts like the "cinema of attractions" and "monstration" fail to describe the Ashantis series. These films are not simple visual pleasures, offered unconditionally outward to the audience. The sheer visibility and visual pleasure of dance is perforated with stillness, while moving limbs and twisted torsos obstruct the unmoving bodies of the gathered collective. Rather than a movement of energy outward to the audience, a dialectic of movement and stillness unfolds between these two visual layers. The Ashantis dance films challenge Bazin's reading of spectatorial faith and Doane's notion of early cinematic time. These films do not reaffirm cinema's capacity to represent reality, nor do they delight in the sheer pleasure of any-

instant-whatever. Instead, they represent change mummified in a very literal way. The Ashantis films put this dissonant phrase—*change mummified*—on display. They join motion, movement, and vitality with stillness, death, and taxidermy.<sup>43</sup>

All of the Ashantis films display yet another visual divide. Just beyond the gathered Ashantis, above the tops of the “authentic” village huts, the camera captures the ornate buildings of 1897 Lyon. The image thus contains four visual divisions: the distinctly European architecture of a street in Lyon, the Ashantis village, the motionless Ashantis tribe, and the dancers. Four neat horizontal slices. The visual combination of the Lyonnais city street and the African village echoes the effects and tensions of the photographic-cinematic division. Like the immobile collective joined to the irrepressible dancing body, it is an awkward and confusing juxtaposition. The modern facades confront one’s gaze in much the same manner as the stoic community, mitigating the immersive fantasy of the ethnographic exposition and the swirling gestures of the dancing bodies. More than a disruption of cinematic representation, this visual divide reveals the conditions of the ethnographic exposition and the fragility of this particular heterotopian site.<sup>44</sup> The composition of the film frame deters

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<sup>43</sup> Here, I am using the term “taxidermy” differently than Rony does in her discussion of *Nanook of the North*, which I discuss in Chapter Three. For Rony, the immersive experience of cinema, combined with its representation of mummified past time makes for a more oppressive, controlled encounter between viewer and image. In other words, Rony challenges Bazin’s theory of “change mummified.” She defines cinema as mummification, over and above its photographic counterpart. In my understanding of the term, taxidermy can apply to both the photographic and the film image. The term describes the startling immobility and uncanny temporality that can inflect indexical forms of visual reproduction. The subjects of both photographic and cinematic representation pass before the camera lens. The camera records these subjects, removes them from the flow of “real” time. Photographs and films, inscribed with the past time of recording, circulate within “real” time, against its continual flow. While these conditions define most forms of photographic and cinematic representation, the effects of taxidermy are not necessarily a visible, essential part of every photograph or film, nor can the term “taxidermy” be limited to one form of visual reproduction over any other.

<sup>44</sup> As opposed to utopian spaces, which are sites “with no real place,” heterotopias are “something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality,” (24). Foucault lists cemeteries, gardens, prisons, libraries, mental hospitals, brothels, and colonies as examples. In and upon these sites, one can glimpse an image of a community’s traditions, values, and ideologies. One can likewise glimpse other times and histories. The cemetery and the library

one from reading or receiving the colonial exposition as “outside” all real places, as an otherworldly enclave, or as an authentic African village. Within the same frame, the Ashantis films present exotic tribal dances and convincing African huts, as well as the trappings of a Western city. The Ashantis films fuel the multiple fantasies embodied by the exposition while simultaneously grounding the exposition in a very particular (Western) place. In these films, one cannot dwell too long in the fantastic counter-site of the exposition without seeing the social space out of which and for which it was produced. Doubling the intrusion of photographic time, the sliver of Lyon which crowns the cinematic frame, the windows of the buildings appearing like tiny eyes in the distance, disturbs not only the temporality of the exposition, which positions the Ashantis tribe in an imagined prehistoric past, but also the uninterrupted flow of early cinematic time. It relentlessly reminds viewers that these films were made on a particular day, a very long time ago.

I would like to shift this analysis to the actions and events that unfold in the Ashantis series. The dance films adhere to the structural patterns that Deutelbaum outlines. None opens onto activity already underway. The films begin and the dances begin shortly thereafter. In the first *Danse du sabre* film, two men dance in the center of the frame, each one holding a sword and threatening the other. Their bodies exchange places several times as they move in a circular, counter-clockwise direction. One of the men thrusts his sword forward, while the other man steps back. This push-and-pull, give-and-take rhythm continues throughout the near entirety of the film.

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accumulate time infinitely, while the ethnographic exposition takes visitors back in time, to the beginning of time, and, in effect, out of modern time. The Ashantis exposition represents an African village in the present, as it was upon Gravier’s “discovery,” and guarantees the presence of African natives. But, the present “African time” and the presented bodies of the ethnographic expositions are always reframed as the past of “civilized time.” The Ashantis exposition and its ethnographic subjects are viewed as evidence of human ancestry, of man’s primitive beginnings. They are participants in a Western imaginary of pastness, even in their strikingly visible presence. See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986): 22-27.

Still, the spectator is never able to passively consume the performance, to watch this dance ritual undetected, in silent pleasure. During the first thirty seconds of the dance, one of the men intermittently turns his head to face the camera. He takes a step, drives his sword toward his partner, and looks at the camera, his gaze joining those of the many standing silently in the background. Just before the end of the film, this same man turns his body to face the camera and threatens it with his sword (Figure 1.1). The other man continues to dance, moving his body back and forth, but the shape of the dance and the union between the two men collapses. The man turns back to face his partner and the film concludes. In the second *Danse du sabre* film, the same men are centered in the frame. This time, however, both men are facing the camera, waiting for the signal to begin from the operator. Their looks are joined by those of the men behind them. The “dancing” in this film does not resemble that of its predecessor. Both men engage the camera, rather than each other. They gesture at the device that records them, stabbing at it with their swords (Figure 1.2). But there is no rhythm, at least none that resembles the cyclical turning of the previous film. They stab inconsistently, sometimes in unison, sometimes taking turns. The film ends with both men in mid-gesture. In the *Danse du féticheur*, the organization of the action differs slightly from that of the *Danse du sabre* films. When the film begins, the fetishist has not yet entered the center of the frame. He stands with the crowd, on the left. His face is covered with white paint and he makes small vibrations with his body. Suddenly, he jumps into the center of the frame and begins spinning in place. He does not move from this central position and his spinning does not end. Not once does he look up or engage the camera.

In 1996, the *Centre National de la Cinématographie* and the *Bibliothèque du Film* collaboratively published a production catalogue for the Lumière archive. The catalogue contains the titles, dates, original publicity descriptions, and, in many cases,





Figure 1.1  
*Danse du sabre I*



Figure 1.2  
*Danse du sabre II*

the names of the operators for each Lumière film. The catalogue also supplements the original publicity descriptions with what were intended to be more accurate or complete descriptions of the films, descriptions intended to appeal to scholars of the Lumière films, rather than theater owners and/or potential investors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Surprisingly, the updated descriptions for the Ashantis dance films, though certainly more detailed than the original studio descriptions, omit significant features of the films. Both *sabre* films are described thusly: “Two men, armed with a sword, mime a curious combat to the sound of a tom-tom drum and hands clapping.”<sup>45</sup> The description makes no mention of the camera’s involvement, the dancers’ gestures, or the visual shift between the first and second films. The description of *Danse du féticheur* is similarly oblique: “To the sound of the tam-tam drum and clapping hands, the fetisher dances.”<sup>46</sup> These descriptions articulate a common refrain in Lumière scholarship. The films are straightforward, visually plain, fifty-second records of continuous time. In isolating a single narrative thread and reducing the *vues* to the barest of visual essentials, both the original studio descriptions and the more recent efforts of the production catalogue resonate with Gaudreault’s notion of the “micro-narrative.” A sword dance. A dancer moves with swords. A fetish dance. A fetisher turns in circles. Against such simplifications, I argue that the Ashantis films demonstrate multiple micro-narrative form. They layer small narrative threads, one upon the other, in a single frame, across a single Lumière film and fifty seconds’ time. They are distinct narrative kernels, which together constitute the film.

In the first *Danse du Sabre* film, there are *at least* four micro-narratives at work. Each of these micro-narratives comes into contact and conflicts with the others.

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<sup>45</sup> Aubert and Seguin, *La Production cinématographique*, 176.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

The first micro-narrative is the centrally positioned dance between the two men holding swords. These men engage each other and, as partners in combat, occasionally glance at the crowd of onlookers. The second micro-narrative is the gathered crowd itself. As I noted in my description of the film, one man sits and plays the drums, while others stand quietly. Some of those in the crowd clap and watch the dancers, while others stare directly into the camera. Neither the Lumière description nor the production catalogue acknowledges their presence, but they are quite visibly there, contributing to the actions that unfold in the image. The third micro-narrative develops between the dancer and the camera and, perhaps in its projection, the dancer and the audience. This micro-narrative begins with the dancer's glances and becomes a violent confrontation. In shifting his attention to the camera, the micro-narrative of the dance breaks down, becomes something else. One man dancing in place, his once-raised sword at his side. The fourth micro-narrative is the ethnographic exposition itself, with the straw huts and Lyonnais architecture hovering in the background. In all of the Ashantis films, the space of the exposition plays a role and tells a story. These films defy their titles and accompanying descriptions. The actions they represent conflict with one another, overwhelm the frame, and communicate "too much." They cannot be reduced to one sentence, one verb, or one activity. Against what Timothy Mitchell describes as the "strangely ordered world of modern commerce and consumers," which organized the colonial exhibitions in Paris, as well as the shopping arcades and department stores proliferating beyond their gates, the Ashantis films refuse these processes of visual separation, classification, and commodification.<sup>47</sup> Rather, they exhibit simultaneous disorder, uncommodifiable chaos. One could equally consider *Barque sortant du port* as a film with multiple micro-narratives: the boat crossing the frame, the collection of women and children on

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<sup>47</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 11.

the dock watching as the boat departs, their departure from the dock, and the wave crashing against the boat. The film contains simultaneous and multiple happenings, rather than a single action interrupted by an unexpected event.

Like the ethnographic exposition itself, early ethnographic cinema hinges upon visual presence and visual representation. Both put the human body on display and require an interaction between bodies. In written forms of ethnographic practice, by contrast, the ethnographer serves as the sole source, the sole transmitter of any and all details of the ethnographic subject. S/he constructs the image and mediates the encounter. Ethnographic cinema operates in a fundamentally different way and furnishes a unique set of guarantees. The ethnographic subject stood, danced, smiled, laughed, stared before the camera. The filmmaker, too, was physically present and close enough to record these unfamiliar bodies and actions. One can certainly outline points of comparison between the ethnographic operator/production team/film studio and the ethnographic writer. Both mediate the representation of their subjects. The operator can choose where to position the camera and when to turn on the machine. S/he can make requests of the subjects who, in the case of the Ashantis tribe, may be disempowered by and dependent upon their Western hosts. As technology becomes available, ethnographic filmmakers can reinsert writing in the form of intertitles and they can edit the raw footage in a way that deviates significantly from its initial form. And, indeed, ethnographic cinema experiments with each of these techniques in turn. But the subject of early ethnographic cinema nevertheless represents him/herself. No matter how desperately a film may try to manipulate or position these bodies as dancers or statues in the distance, they do not always willingly perform. The ethnographic subject can return the gaze of the camera, walk out of the frame, move too fast, etc. In early ethnographic cinema, the ethnographic subject always functions as a site of potential *resistance* or disruptive contingency. S/he creates micro-

narratives where none existed and when the operators could not have anticipated. In early ethnographic cinema, the ethnographic subject does not control his/her body, his/her image as completely as will be possible in the decades to come, but neither do the filmmakers of early ethnographic film wield complete control over the image they produce and the bodies contained therein.

To conclude my discussion of the Ashantis dance films, I will consider the visual presence of the ethnographic subject and the forms of resistance that gather within the frame. In the *Danse du Sabre* films, the dancers' confrontations with the camera not only suspend or eliminate the cyclical motion of the dance; it also acknowledges the very presence of the camera and the act of cinematic representation under way. This acknowledgement comes in the form of a long blade, jabbed repeatedly in the direction of the camera, the operator, and the audience. The dance between the two men collapses only to continue as a dance between the dancers in the frame and those who have gathered to watch. We become the threatened partner(s), implicated in the performance. These films shock the viewer. They manifest the contingent, the threatening break with familiarity, the unanticipated events that defy the operator's control and endanger the existence of the film (and, perhaps more immediately, the operator). The dancers also defy their own visual consumption and, in doing so, interrupt the visual continuity of the film. The dancers create "cuts" with their blows, returning the violence of an uninvited witness with the violence of a deftly handled blade.

In the *Danse du féticheur*, the dancer defies visual consumption in an altogether different way. The dancer does not display distinct movements that can be analyzed or measured. The dancer does not even look at the camera. He becomes movement, swirling so furiously in place that his body becomes a blur that the gaze of the camera cannot penetrate. We are invited to look, but there is nothing to see.

Nothing, that is, except for the stoic gazes of those who surround the dancer, who return our curiosity with the same kind of refusal that the dancer's performance embodies. Though the fetishier wields no weapon, the speed of his movements brings the threat of the unexpected within the frame. Anything could happen—the dancer could stop, step out of view, or confront the camera with the same intensity as the other dancers—and the operator could do nothing but record. One waits for the shock, the rupture, or the stray moment with a distinct awareness that the ethnographic subject exerts control over his/her representation and the micro-narrativity of the film. What is more, none of the films in the Ashantis series ends in a well-structured way. The celluloid simply runs out and—in the case of the dance *vues*—the dancers are frozen in mid-motion. The operators could not anticipate or structure a conclusion. These films thus end with a distinct set of separations: the Ashantis separate from their representation, reality separates from cinema. One is left with the sensation that the Ashantis continue beyond the frame and that the cinematic form simply could not keep up.

Accidents happen. The potential exists for them to happen at any moment and to be captured on film. A wave can crash into a boat. A wall can fall. A gust of wind can detract viewers' attention from the intended focus of the film. Analyses of *Barque sortant du port* claim the film as an example of early cinema's wondrous vulnerability. The film simply captured the world as it unfolded, with all of its unexpected dangers and delights. But there is a difference between these forms of unexpected events and those that regularly surface in ethnographic cinema. Both register as accidents or disruptions. Yet, the former emerges from an unseen origin, while the latter bursts forth from the autonomous, cognitive, and visible human body. It is the difference between an accident and resistance. Here, I am using the term "resistance" to refer to a range of possible gestures and actions. Resistance need not originate out of radical

politics or an ethnographic subject's conscious opposition to his/her representation, though such examples abound in early ethnographic cinema and should be included beneath the umbrella of this term. As I am using it, resistance refers to the common visual result of a cinema that takes the human body as an object and that tries to represent that body as a stable, predictable, malleable, or unthinking form. This resistance can be a sword pointed at the camera or something far more subtle. It can take the shape of what Lyotard terms "acinema," and gather at the poles of mobility and immobility. "Instead of good, unifying, and reasonable forms," the resistant image can display the unproductive and misspent energies of a body that spins in place, of "vain simulacra, blissful intensities [...] real diversions or wasteful drifts."<sup>48</sup>

Ethnographic cinema eventually found ways to "fix" its subjects as objects, edit away the traces of autonomous action, coerce its subjects into narrative roles, and quell the threat of "real" bodies on film. Nevertheless, the first thirty years of ethnographic cinema contain innumerable acts of resistance, produced out of the encounter between the operator/camera and the human subject(s). In ethnographic cinema, what dwells beyond the control of the operator/camera is not simply the natural world surrounding its subjects, but the very subjects it takes as its central concern. In the Ashantis films, the huts in the background could collapse or rain could begin to fall. These threats exist as they do for all single-shot, unedited cinema. In an altogether different expression of contingency, the ethnographic subject could choose not to comply or could unknowingly resist the operators' aims. Both kinds of unexpected events are accidents, contingencies, disruptions. However, they belong to different orders of the unexpected.

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<sup>48</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, "Acinema" *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 351, 353.



*Difference and Repetition: Égypte, Tunisie, and Mexique, 1896-1897*

Lumière production spanned a considerable window of cinema history and covered a large swath of nineteenth-century geography. A vast quantity and visual range of films could be examined as products of what I have called the first ethnographic filmmaking expedition. In what remains of this chapter, I will expand my analysis beyond the Ashantis exposition and study a handful of films from three major Lumière expeditions: Egypt, Tunisia, and Mexico. Alexandre Promio filmed the *vues* from Egypt and Tunisia, while Gabriel Veyre filmed those from Mexico.<sup>49</sup> My objective is not to provide a complete and comprehensive survey of the Lumière expedition films but, rather, to begin to reframe these films, to ask new questions of them, and to outline the visual, temporal, and narrative elements that continue to shape ethnographic filmmaking well after the closing of the Lumière studio and the shift away from actuality and documentary filmmaking at the end of the twentieth century's first decade. These films no doubt resemble the Ashantis series, sharing in their photographic qualities, multiple micro-narratives, and displays of resistance, as well as their singular interest in the unfamiliar and the faraway. However, these expedition films are not bound to the heterotopic and performative space of the ethnographic exposition. These films unfold "in the world" and, as such, bear a resemblance to one other, as well as to the earliest Lumière actualities filmed in France between 1895 and 1896.

The Lumière actualities that were filmed in France can be divided into a small collection of categories. Anyone who has taken more than the most cursory of looks at the Lumière films or who has skimmed the titles of the Lumière production catalogue will have noticed the preponderance of films which display a "rue," "arrivée" "défilé," "débarquement," "départ" "panorama," and "sortie." Films

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<sup>49</sup> Aubert and Seguin, *La Production cinématographique*, 362-364.

depicting arrivals, departures, and bustling street scenes are a staple of the Lumière collection. If the camera was not aboard a train, boat, or trolley, watching places come into and go out of view, it was often firmly fixed on a street corner, train platform, or boat harbor, witnessing the constant flow of arrivals and departures, tourists and locals, leisure and work rhythms. The Lumière camera did not simply proffer a new form of visual representation; it transformed the world into one of movement, travel, and visual exchange. Walter Benjamin beautifully describes the eruptive possibilities of cinema:

Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended [...] An unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man.<sup>50</sup>

The camera represented movement, but it was also made to move. The camera traveled. The filmmakers traveled. The films traveled. The *cinématographe* invited viewers to feast their eyes upon never-before-imagined touristic destinations. It also encouraged viewers to reimagine the familiar as strange, the domestic as foreign. Many actualities filmed in Paris and Lyon represent the view a traveler to these cities might have had upon his/her arrival and departure. With the camera positioned upon a boat or a train as it entered or exited the city, viewers became travelers. Films of this sort were screened in Paris and Lyon, other French towns, and abroad. Beyond

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<sup>50</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 236.

France's urban centers, these films satisfied the desire to visit France's bustling cities. In the cities, the films encouraged French viewers to imagine Paris and Lyon as just one of a number of possible destinations, as a place people visit from elsewhere, as someone's "foreign" destination.

These popular categories in the Lumière collection—arrivals, departures, street scenes, panoramas, etc.—also traveled. They traveled to nearly every country visited during the expeditions and they shape the films from "elsewhere." On March 23, 1896, a camera waits at the end of a train station in Lyon. People mill about on the platform, some look into the camera. The train arrives and passengers descend, mixing with the awaiting crowd. Between 1896 and 1903, nearly the same "arriving train" *vue* is filmed in New York City, Melbourne, Cairo, Kingstown (Ireland), Nagoya (Japan), and Jaffa (present-day Tel-Aviv). This is but one small example of the visual duplications that inform the Lumière catalogue. These visual repetitions testify to the "sameness" of life elsewhere or the equivalent strangeness between life in France and life around the world. All at once, numerous cities across the globe were experiencing new technological innovations, forms of travel, and public entertainments. The landscape of public life was changing, as was one's experience of space and time. The expeditions not only guaranteed a certain global simultaneity to cinema's arrival, but also produced an archive of urban spaces at approximately the same historical moment. In other words, the Lumière archive is designed to capture similarity and repetition. The expedition films from Egypt, Tunisia, and Mexico do not escape this affinity for sameness. These films repeat themes, movements, and visual compositions over and again. And yet, they differ considerably from their domestic predecessors and counterparts. Like any repetition in the catalogue, the expedition films repeat visions at a different time, in a different place, and with

different subjects. But the differences that these films exhibit are not limited to these kinds of natural separations across space and time.

At the time of Alexandre Promio's expeditions, Egypt was a British colony and Tunisia was under French colonial control. Both of these countries fueled Western fantasies about the Orient—its ancient civilizations, mysterious religious practices, and shadowed harems. Promio's films depict Egypt and Tunisia as unfamiliar and primitive, despite the fact that both countries were governed by European colonies and, in many parts of their capital cities, had been transformed by European architecture and bodies. In Promio's films, the streets of Cairo are made of dirt, rather than concrete. Tunisians are barefooted and robed, rather than cloaked in European-style dress. Beyond *mise-en-scène*, the composition of these expedition images deviates from its thematic counterparts, filmed in France, England, Italy, Germany, and the United States. Nevertheless, the street scenes from Egypt and Tunisia do not lend themselves to a quick dismissal as facile propaganda. Though they may be motivated by a clear division between a sophisticated "us" and a primitive "them," these films do not make this division clear, nor do the choices made by Promio and other Lumière operators so easily reveal their ideological predispositions.

In Promio's films one can begin to detect the strangeness of the archive's repetitions. Like the actualities from France, the titles of Promio's Tunisian and Egyptian films reveal an attention to the country's cities—their streets and surfaces, places and monuments—as well as daily arrivals and departures. The Egyptian series includes *Pont du Kasr-el-Nil*, *Sortie du pont de Kasr-el-Nil I-II*, *Kasr-el-Nil*, *Rue Sayeda Zeinab*, *Rue Sharia-el-Nahassine*, three panoramas (or *Départs*) taken from a train, and eight panoramas of the Nile river banks (*Panorama des rives du Nil I-VIII*). The Tunisian series contains *Porte Bab-el-Khadra*, *Porte de France*, *Rue Sidi-Ben-*

*Arous, Rue El-Halfaouine, and Place Bab-Souika*. By the end of 1896, the Lumière operators had filmed the major landmarks in Paris, New York, London, Rome, and Berlin. These films often appear as postcards in motion. Operators typically positioned their subjects in the center of the frame, with the camera at an angle and a considerable distance. This technique lent the image a certain depth and created a space in the foreground for passing pedestrians, cars, buggies, and trolleys. These films nearly burst with activity. *Champs Elysées* (1896) and *Place de la Concorde, Obélisque et Fontaines* (1896) are emblematic of this style. In the former *vue*, the operator positions the camera to the side of the famous Parisian street, creating the effect of depth within the frame. The street continues, ever-widening into the background of the image. In the foreground, horse-drawn carriages and their passengers strut past the camera and out of view or into the frame and along the Champs-Élysées. Pedestrians likewise enter the frame to cross the two directions of carriage traffic. In *Place de la Concorde*, the operator similarly positions the camera on a street corner overlooking the *Place*. The camera captures two directions of traffic in the foreground and a wide swath of pedestrian activity on the *Place* in the background.

With rare exception, Promio filmed street scenes of Egypt and Tunisia much like the Ashantis series: frontally and without attempting to “deepen” the visual field. He positioned his camera in the middle of Cairo’s and Tunis’s busy pathways, facing the action of oncoming foot traffic. Not only does this particular position flatten the frame and its visual contents, it also creates multiple visual obstructions. The passing body of a single person often completely covers the camera lens. In turn, bodies become indecipherable and formless. Spectators receive neither a stable view of the street, nor any coherent sense of the activities unfolding upon it. *Rue Sharia-el-Nahassine* and *Rue El-Halfaouine* provide excellent examples of this technique. In

these films, Promio places the camera in the center of the street, as though part of the action (a person on his/her way to work, going to market, carrying out some daily chore, or visiting the city). Individuals and animals emerge out of and disappear into the camera. Rather than a general portrait of city life or a particular street, these films represent fragmented bodies and animals, occasionally disrupted by a quick glimpse of the street and other passers-by. These films focus enormous attention upon the body of the Other, its physicality and force, the minutiae of its movements. One might interpret these films as bearers of an all-too-common image of Africa and the Ethnographic, an image that represents them both as sites of social disorder, where humans and animals intermingle in mutual states of depravity and filth. However, the position and proximity of the camera also blurs the division between “us” and “them” in a very concrete way. The camera/operator becomes a part of the crowd, inviting spectators into the streets and the life of these cities.

For the first audiences of these films, this type of visual invitation would have been unnecessary. Promio’s films of Egypt were first screened in Cairo. The day before his arrival in 1896, a local paper announced, “Egypt in the cinématographe. Mr. Promio—the premier photographer for the Lumière studio in Lyon—will be arriving tomorrow by boat. Mr. Promio will be here to take some Egyptian vues which will later be projected with the Cinématographe.”<sup>51</sup> In Cairo, audiences for these films could have been average Egyptian citizens, colonial officials, tourists, or some combination of all three. The films were later screened in Western Europe, beginning with theaters in Lyon and Paris. I mention these details only to underscore the difficulty one encounters in trying to locate an ideological dividing line. These films sustain an irresolvable tension between distance and proximity, presence and absence, too little and too much. Promio flattens the image, yet positions the camera

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<sup>51</sup> Aubert and Seguin, *La Production cinématographique*, 72.

amid the bustling life of the city. His camera fragments the subjects, yet brings viewers incredibly close to their bodies and faces. Add to this visual tension an audience who would have been searching for signs of the self rather than the Other, and the ideological import of these films becomes all the more uncertain.

The location of the camera in these films also inevitably calls attention to the curious machine and the man firmly planted in the midst of the crowd. Although the Lumière operators famously welcomed the attention of passers-by and their direct looks into the lens of the camera, these looks are often incidental, peripheral in *vues* of European cities. At the time, the returned gaze was neither the central taboo of a “sophisticated” cinema, nor the main visual attraction. In European *vues*, the frame gathers eager onlookers at its edges, but the camera typically focuses away from these glances, beyond them, toward another, pre-determined visual landmark. By contrast, a number of expedition films represent little more than this exchange between subject and camera, between the look of the operator and the look of the operated-upon. Filmed in Tunis, *Porte de France* (1896) begins with a frontal view of what appears to be an archway to a city square or marketplace. Bodies move into and out of the frame, as the camera is positioned directly in the flow of traffic. After a few seconds, a man walks up to the camera and stares directly into the lens. He does not move away. A few seconds later, several children approach the lens, staring motionlessly into the machine. The port ceases to be visible, displaced by the returned looks of the gathered community. The film concludes, with spectators never having seen the movements into and out of the *Porte de France*, never having seen much more than the curious looks of a man and some children.<sup>52</sup> Unlike the Ashantis exposition films, this scene

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<sup>52</sup> In his essay, “In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film,” Tom Gunning traces the popular and scientific interest in the human face through abbreviated histories of physiognomy, psychology, photography, and early film. Of the early film genre composed entirely of faces in extreme close-up (faces chewing, sneezing, kissing, laughing, etc.), he writes, “We must not lose sight of the comedic nature of these close-ups, quite at odds with the sober discourse of scientific

is not countered by a foreground of vibrant motion. The film represents the stillness of returned vision and little else.

Many may argue that these obstructions typify the hazards of single-shot filmmaking. Images can be disrupted, undone, or redirected. The representation of market activities can become the representation of multiple looks or fragmented bodies. The actions and images they deliver are not the product of a thinking director, but an unthinking machine unable to pause, rewind, undo. They are the primitive manifestations of a too-early cinema and one need not spend time deciphering their content.

In opposition to such claims, I would argue that Promio's films court disruptions, much more so than the Lumière films shot in Paris, London, and New York (to name only a few of the Western cities that escape these kinds of visual events). Promio positions the camera among the traffic and disrupts the movements of the street. The returned gaze of the films' subjects only fortifies a disorienting and disruptive presence already established by Promio himself. The spectator was unable to make sense of the image, to see clearly, long before the look of the subjects entered into the frame. Furthermore, the visual qualities of these films—the extreme close-ups, the fragmented bodies, the attention to the physicality of the subjects, and the frequently returned gaze—offer a glimpse of an ethnographic cinema to come. The sacrifice of visual clarity for physical proximity will surface over and again during the next thirty years of ethnographic filmmaking. It is precisely this visual technique that

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investigation. The popular curiosity that delights in these odd and marvelous expressions and facial behavior does part company with the use of photography as a means of investigation and operates more like a parody of the Gnostic impulse. In their delight in the ridiculous and the nonsensical, the uncivilized aspects of the human body, the contortions rather than the expressions of the face, the early facial expression films derive from a long clowning traditions of grimaces which stretches from medieval jesters through circus traditions to nineteenth century vaudeville," (19). The close-ups of faces scattered throughout the Lumière expedition films may very well belong outside this particular genre of faces. They are neither crafted gag reels, nor playful distractions. The invited/returned gazes of this collection more closely resemble the photographic images of facial physiognomy that Gunning describes. See *Modernism/Modernity* 4.1 (1997): 1-29.



Karl Heider eventually abolishes from visual anthropology with his insistence upon “whole people in whole acts,” a principle which I discuss at length in the introduction to this dissertation.

To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that the Lumière films gave rise to a mode of filmmaking that steadily developed over the course of the next twenty or thirty years, culminating in the narrative rigidity of *Nanook of the North* (1922). Ethnographic cinema does not follow an evolutionary path, gradually refining its methods and techniques until it reaches some perfect, pre-ordained conclusion. Nor am I suggesting that Promio or any of the Lumière operators were consciously participating in the production of ethnographic forms. Instead, I would argue that Promio’s films reflect an early encounter between the tensions of ethnographic practice and the medium of cinema. These films exhibit a compulsion to see and not see, to be close and yet distant. At the same time, films such as *Porte de France* further testify to the forms of visual resistance that distinguish ethnographic filmmaking from other forms of ethnographic representation. No matter the motivations or ideological underpinnings, whether one desires to violently dissect the body of an ethnographic subject with the camera or use the camera to become a part of the ethnographic scene, these films must negotiate with the very real presence of ethnographic subject(s). The results frequently include refusals to move, to step away from the lens, or to direct one’s vision away from the camera that continues to film. In *Porte de France*, one encounters the immobile, acinematic complement to the swirling body of *Danse du féticheur*. Both films communicate a similarly unproductive, visual resistance.

As I previously mentioned, the Lumière catalogue communicates similarity and repetition across the globe. Operators captured certain events and themes over and over again, no matter the location. I would like to discuss one final expedition

film in order to articulate the crucial ways in which these repetitions shape the Lumière collection, across the division between here and elsewhere, home and abroad. On September 6, 1896 Gabriel Veyre shot *Repas d'Indiens* in Mexico. It was first screened in Mexico City on September 13, 1896 and first projected in Lyon on February 21, 1897.<sup>53</sup> Like those in the Egyptian and Tunisian collections, this film repeats popular Lumière themes, particularly that of domestic life and leisure. On March 22, 1895, Louis Lumière filmed *Repas de bébé*. Rather than the screeching halt of a train or the busy exit of workers at the end of a long day, the film depicts an intimate and idealized family exchange. The film features Auguste Lumière, his wife Marguerite, and their young son, Andrée, gathered around a lunch table at the Lumière studio in Lyon. Andrée is seated between his parents, who feed him. Along with every other *vue* made in 1895, *Repas de bébé* has become a canonical vision of the Lumière collection. In subsequent years, the theme of the family meal and, more broadly, the intimate activities of the home inspired a number of Lumière films starring the Lumière family, including *Repas en famille* (1896), *Premiers pas de bébé* (1896), *Repas de chats* (1896), *Enfants aux jouets* (1897), *Le Gouter des bébés* (1897), and *Déjeuner des deux bébés et du minet* (1898).

Although explicitly tied to the domestic precursor of *Repas de bébé*, *Repas d'Indiens* deviates from not only the idyllic representations of bourgeois family life, but also the kinds of narrative and visual structures that organize these popular films.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Aubert and Seguin, *La Production cinématographique*, 364.

<sup>54</sup> *Repas d'Indiens* is but one of a number of the ethnographic expedition films that mirror scenes of domestic life in the Lumière household. *Baignade de Négrillons*, for example, resonates with the vacation scenes from *Baignade en mer*. During the summer of 1895, Louis Lumière filmed *Baignade en mer* in the beachside village of La Ciotat, along with several other “family vacation at the sea” themed films. The Lumière brothers vacationed with their children and families in La Ciotat and, in 1893, opened a small studio and theater. *Baignade en mer* is visually composed much like *Barque sortant du port* (and in fact, this film was also made during the summer of 1897, in the same vacation spot). A dock is on the right side of the frame, with the open sea and rocks on the left. When the film begins five children run, one by one, to the end of the dock and jump into the water. After the jump, each child crawls up the rocks, back onto the dock. Each child jumps twice. Although the film furnishes a glimpse of the French bourgeoisie, of happy children on vacation, playing at the seaside, it

*Repas d'Indiens* presents a group of Mexican men, women, and children. Plates of food are positioned in front of them, but they do not eat. They stare directly into the camera, while a crowd of European men stands and sits behind them. One of these men, seated in the far left corner of the frame, throws food at the camera, at the Indian adults seated on the ground, and at a baby. He eventually stands up and grabs the face of one of the seated men, as if to force him to eat (Figure 1.3). The other (white) men in the image laugh at this gesture. The assaulted man pulls his face away and the film concludes. Surprisingly, a review in the *Lyon Républicain* addresses the awkwardness of the film, though it omits the presence of the abusive onlookers and instead blames the camera for the Indians' discomfort: "It is to an Indian shanty that the Cinématographe first leads us, where we are made to witness a very unique meal; the Indians who are supposed to take part seem skeptical of the indiscrete lens."<sup>55</sup>

Even the original promotional description for the film acknowledges the unusual visual arrangement, though it, too, manages to gloss over several aspects of the film, including the subjects' resistance to eating and the abuse of the spectators who enclose them: "Surrounded by spectators, a group of Indians eat their meals out of bowls."<sup>56</sup>

Mirroring the *mise-en-scène* of the Ashantis films, the seated subjects of *Repas d'Indiens* create a semicircular "performance" space in the foreground of the image. The catalogue's use of the term "spectator" likewise frames the film as a recording of a performance, inviting audience members to join the spectators in watching the show. The subjects nevertheless refuse to perform and the stage remains empty. In keeping with early ethnographic convention, *Repas d'Indiens* captures a distinct tension between movement and stillness, the cinematic and the photographic. However, rather

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tempers these notions of play, leisure, and even the potential risk to the children playing by an unruly sea with a very strictly organized visual composition and micro-narrative structure.

<sup>55</sup> Aubert and Seguin, *La Production cinématographique*, 364.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 365.



Figure 1.3  
*Repas d'Indiens*

than a tension between two modes of ethnographic representation—a subject made to move and a subject made still—the film captures the European male in motion and the photographically still ethnographic subjects, arranged as though for a portrait. *Repas d’Indiens* exhibits multiple micro-narratives, produced out of the triangulated tension between the European spectators, the Mexicans, and the camera. Perhaps more literally and viscerally than any other Lumière film, *Repas d’Indiens* hinges upon the visual representation of resistance. This resistance unfolds along the multiple micro-narrative axes. The ethnographic subjects resist the camera and the European spectators represented alongside them. The European spectators resist the stillness of the ethnographic subjects and the camera’s failure to make its subjects move. Each axis exerts different forms of power and produces different forms of resistance. The camera is not equivalent to the Europeans in the frame, and the ethnographic subjects are not simply the victim of these two simultaneous powers. Moreover, it is not clear where spectators’ alliances would fall in such a film. Does one identify with the camera? With the European spectators who assume the position of a tourist? With the ethnographic subjects who stare directly into the lens? Though certainly not a resounding affirmation or a reliable litmus test of European opinion, the *Républicain*’s assertion that we are “made to witness” the meal that never was, at the very least, suggests some discomfort and confusion on the part of viewers. It also hints at yet another axis of power and potential resistance: the encounter between viewers and the film.

As a repetition of a popular Lumière theme, and perhaps even a particular film, *Repas d’Indiens* registers as an inversion of the original and as the dark underbelly of the bourgeois fantasy. Where once a happy baby in a white frock was encouraged by his parents to eat lunch in the cool breezes of a European afternoon, a group of adults and children are flanked by aggressive European men and almost force-fed their

meals. They are harassed, pelted with food, and grabbed. The encouragement of loving parents is transformed into the monstrous aggressions of the leisure class. *Repas d'Indiens* functions as a kind of errant copy, a failed repetition, or, as Deleuze might contend, a simulacrum. As I discuss at length in Chapter Four, Deleuze claims that the simulacrum “places in question the very notations of copy and model [...] *Copies* are secondary possessors. They are well-founded pretenders, guaranteed by resemblance; *simulacra* are like false pretenders [...] implying an essential perversion or deviation.”<sup>57</sup> Copies make a good faith effort to re-present an original, to successfully complete the repetition. By contrast, the simulacrum fails to replicate the original, to remain faithful to its predecessor. The simulacrum is born of the original (thought, image, object), but it becomes something else, something devious. The simulacrum threatens the original, distorting and disturbing its contents.

If one thinks about *Repas d'Indiens*, as well as the Egyptian and Tunisian street scenes, as simulacra one can begin to understand yet another way in which the Lumière expedition films produce meaning. They contain multiple micro-narratives, visual divisions and disruptions, photographic temporalities, and forceful resistances. However, these films also “mean” in comparison to the standard Lumière films, the ones that scholars most frequently discuss, the ones that constitute the Lumière canon. These films are *not* continuous, visually whole, temporally coherent, exhibitionist, visual pleasures. And, yet they remain tied to these “original” films and these canonical qualities. Part of what makes a film like *Repas d'Indiens* so disturbing, aside from the inherently disturbing scenes of physical abuse, is its deviant resonances with a film like *Repas de bébé*. And part of what makes the simulacrum so interesting is its effect upon the originals, the models, the canonical works. The disturbances of *Repas d'Indiens* inevitably inflect those Lumière films that depict scenes of familial

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 256.

bliss. *Repas d'Indiens* challenges these films, disrupts their surfaces of idyllic bourgeois life. Against the image of adults and children being pelted with food and forced to eat, two parents lovingly serving their child a meal seems laughably staged. One can even think of the seemingly benign titles for these films—for example, “an Indian meal”—as the Platonic or, in this case, ethnographic “Idea.” The films that rise to meet these titles always deviate, surprise, and shock.

### *To Conclude and Begin Differently*

Early ethnographic cinema is a doubly condemned practice. These films were produced in a moment of cinematic history that scholars have had to vigorously defend against accusations of incompetence, formlessness, and archival excess. They were also born of the nineteenth-century cultural fascination with racial difference, global tourism, and ethnographic spectacle, as well as the ever-expanding reach of Western imperialism. Whether early ethnographic films are ignored in virtue of their status as works of early cinema or as works of ethnography, words like *primitive*, *crude*, and *rudimentary* commonly emerge to justify their exclusion. One must pause at the frequent enunciation of these terms in the discourses that aim to critique early ethnographic cinema. That the very division between modernity and primitivity, refined and crude would be invoked so as to reject a work of ethnography seems a fascinating displacement. With the suggestion of such a division, binaries like *self* and *other*, *civilized* and *savage* are not too far away. These terms suggest that we are still swimming in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideological pools. The supposed primitivity of the ethnographic subject shifts to the form of representation charged with capturing that subject, as though this verbal shift offers some kind of retribution to those that the terms previously aimed to describe. Surely, it does not. Nor do these descriptions bring us any closer to understanding this historical moment, the forms of

representation guided by ethnographic impulses, and the differences between them. With this kind of terminology, we adopt the very same verbal tools that nineteenth-century anthropologists used to describe their supposedly inferior subjects. This vacant vocabulary indicates only a continuity of anxiety: from an anxiety in the face of the Other to an anxiety in the face of ethnographic representation.

Early ethnographic cinema is difficult. The films can be difficult to watch. Like pornography or propaganda, they can carry with them a great deal of ideological baggage and their visual contents can sometimes assault the viewer. However, just as curious as critics' use of the term *primitive* to describe these films, the disciplines of anthropology, film studies, and cultural studies often overlook the many ethnographic films produced before Robert Flaherty's seminal work of docu-fiction, *Nanook of the North*. In other words, *primitivity* is not only an empty term, but one of the only terms applied to this mode of filmmaking. In lieu of any effort to understand the ideological investments of early ethnographic cinema, the ways in which it appeals to photographic and written ethnographic practice, and the degree to which it deviates from these predecessors, the term *primitive* enters the discourse as a quick shorthand. It glosses the first few decades of film history, obscures the differences between early ethnographic films, and eliminates the need for close reading. Why critics might feel compelled to distance themselves from this historical moment and early film archive is not difficult to imagine. This project nevertheless engages the global phenomenon of early ethnographic cinema—initiated nearly in tandem with the invention of the *cinématographe*—and tries to understand this visual practice as something more than a transmission of ethnographic ideology, each mode a repetition of the others.

The difficulties of ethnographic cinema extend beyond its ideological motivations. It typically does not abide by the rules of narrativity and coherence that guide Flaherty and his followers. It does not mark the beginning of an evolution



toward narrative sense. It also does not participate in the cinema of attractions that Gunning and Gaudreault describe. Reconsidering the Lumière films within the context of ethnographic cinema is also difficult. Only 812 of the 1428 Lumière films were shot in France. Roughly 15 of those 812 films constitute the Lumière canon in film scholarship. To my knowledge, no one has offered a reading of the Lumière exposition films and few scholars have commented upon those films made beyond France's boundaries. This rereading of the Lumière project presents considerable challenges to early film scholarship as well as to the mythologies surrounding the Lumière studio and the earliest moments of film history. At the same time, it offers new ways of thinking about these films and broadens the field of not only what one might consider an ethnographic film, but also what one might recognize as a work of the *maison Lumière*. In this chapter, I have sketched the earliest incarnations of ethnographic cinema: its forms and subjects, its repetitions of and deviations from other films produced during cinema's first decade. The unusual terrain of single-shot ethnographic cinema certainly changes as multi-shot filmmaking develops and new techniques emerge. However, as I explore in the chapters that follow, the kinds of instabilities and tensions that define the early Lumière films continue to surface in the teens, twenties, and even the experimental ethnography produced before and after World War II.

Just south of the Bois de Boulogne, at the western edge of Paris, the city's peripheral highway divides the city from its suburbs. The thoroughfare also marks a temporal division between the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries (unbeknownst, I am sure, to the engineers who planned it, the laborers who built it, or the present-day passengers who use it, whipping past on their way to work or home). These kinds of strange temporal juxtapositions are not uncommon in Paris, or any city with more than a few decades of history to claim. But, this particular division between Paris and elsewhere, present and past, this layering of spatial and temporal boundaries, and the particular points of contact which gather at this site are unusual, even for a city such as this.

On this small patch of Paris, the city recedes. It is pushed away, forced outside of the Albert Kahn gardens. A wealthy banker, businessman, and world traveler, Kahn moved to Boulogne-Billancourt in 1895. Shortly thereafter, he purchased four large tracks of land surrounding his home. Between 1897 and 1900, the gardens were designed, planted, and completed.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by his travels throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, Kahn imported non-native plants from around the world and divided the grounds of his property by geographical region and gardening styles. His estate housed distinct French, English, and Japanese gardens, complete with a four-story pagoda that was destroyed by fire in 1952. In a gesture that hints at Kahn's interest in themes of cooperation and reconciliation, he also created several "scenes," as he called them, in which plants from across the globe were gathered together in one

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Bonhomme, "Les jardins d'Albert Kahn: une hétérotopie?" *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940: réalités d'une utopie* (Boulogne: Musée Albert Kahn, Département des Hauts-de-Seine, 1995): 98.

setting.<sup>2</sup> The gardens were meticulously restored between 1988 and 1990 by the *Conseil Général des Hauts-de-Seine*, which took over care of the property in 1968.<sup>3</sup>

Walking north from the *Pont de Saint-Cloud*, along the *Quai du 4 Septembre*, one can trace the dividing line. On the right-hand side: a towering wall of metal gates and code-locked doors. On the left: a cacophony of horns, smog, concrete, trash. The trappings of a city that has outgrown its limits. These gates no doubt reinforce the highway's spatial boundary, protecting that which dwells on the other side and claiming it as most certainly within the city's boundaries. What the gates conceal belongs to Paris. At the same time, the gates separate their contents from modern Paris and the unhinged growth that swells to meet its doors. Much like the walls of a colonial exhibition, the gates guard this heterotopian space against physical and temporal contamination. They also quite literally prevent those who work and visit the Albert Kahn gardens from seeing the city. A code-locked, metal-enclosed oasis. Benjamin's blue flower in the land of technology. "The equipment-free aspect of reality has become the height of artifice."<sup>4</sup> This disjunction between inside and outside, garden and street, past and present is made all the more apparent by the exacting degree to which the gardens are maintained. On a stroll one afternoon, I

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 102. In *The Immigrant Scene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), Sabine Haenni traces the emergence of the "scene" in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban life and visual culture. While Kahn's self-constructed garden scenes lacked the "fleeting" quality of the photographic and cinematic scenes that Haenni describes, they nevertheless reflected a similar obsession with control and colonization: "The proliferation of scenes by definition enacts a paradoxical relationship with questions of power and knowledge. The scene's global aspirations—its ability to seize upon all places of the world, to make all parts of New York City available for collection and consumption—suggest its colonizing tendency and relates it to other attempts to capture and document of history and all of the globe, a documentary impulse equally present in early cinema 'actualities'," (12).

<sup>3</sup> Jeanne Beausoleil, *Panorama des Collections Albert Kahn*, (Paris: Presses Artistiques, 1990): 3. Beausoleil serves as the director of conservation at the Albert Kahn Museum.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work in the Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969): 233. In her essay, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology'," Miriam Hansen reads the "Blue Flower" as a sign of auratic ambivalence. In the image of the Blue Flower, Benjamin suggests "a position from which the cinema could be redeemed—from film history, film theory, as well as film practice—as a medium of experience," (205). See *New German Critique* 87, no. 40 (Winter 1987): 179-224.

noticed a team of gardeners carefully washing the algae off each stone in the Japanese stream. Peculiar as they are, out of place and out of time, these gardens resemble a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gardens that interrupt the busy streets and walkways of Paris.<sup>5</sup> It is the layering of yet another Kahn project, upon and within the first, which distinguishes this site and frequently jars the observer.

In November of 1908, Kahn undertook what he termed a “vaste enquête de réalités.”<sup>6</sup> Kahn was guided by a utopian faith in the transformative possibilities of direct visual experience and he described travel as an occasion to “enter into sympathetic communication with the ideas, feelings, and, in short, the lives of different people.”<sup>7</sup> Accompanied by his mechanic and chauffeur, Albert Dutertre, Kahn and his unlikely companion visited the United States, Japan, China, Sri Lanka, Egypt, and Italy before returning to France on March 11, 1909.<sup>8</sup> Kahn outfitted Dutertre with a battery of visual and auditory equipment and charged him with the imposing responsibility of recording the “realities” of their trip. Dutertre dutifully produced stereoscopic images, color autochromes, short films, and sound recordings (from a recording-phonograph and cylinders he carried in his luggage). Though his efforts were met with inconsistent success—Kahn allowed Dutertre only three months of practice before their departure—this collection of images and sounds constitutes the

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<sup>5</sup> The *Parc des Buttes Chaumont* and the *Jardin des Plantes* communicate spatial and temporal displacement in a similar way. Public parks and gardens began to shape the contours of Paris in the early eighteenth century. Enlightenment-era writers and thinkers debated the necessity of public green space, noting its benefits to physical and mental health. Public gardens offered “natural” oases in a landscape of overwhelmingly impersonal and automated features. While they developed out of the public promenade—places designed for circulation on foot or in carriage, as well as for recreational sport—green spaces of the eighteenth century and beyond invited stasis, immobility, and meditation. For histories of garden planning in Paris, see John Dixon Hunt and Michel Conan, *Tradition and Innovation in French Garden Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Nicholis Papayanis, *Planning Paris Before Haussmann* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Marie Mattera Corneloup, “Albert Kahn autour du monde, 1908-1909,” *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 65.

<sup>7</sup> Albert Kahn, *Autour du monde* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1904): II. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed description of this first expedition, see Corneloup, “Albert Kahn autour du monde,” *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 59-72.

first contribution to an extraordinary ethnographic project that what would soon be termed *Les Archives de la Planète*.

The very title of the project suggests the kind of visual totality Kahn envisioned, as do the forms of representation he ultimately selected to archive the globe. After surveying Dutertre's work, Kahn settled on autochrome photography and 35-millimeter film. The autochrome process would produce still shots in color. Cinema would capture motion in black and white.<sup>9</sup> Together, Kahn imagined, the two media were capable of capturing the totality of a place, a people, a moment. Each method would constitute one half of a more-perfect visual whole. To this end, the two cameras soon joined a team of operators on image-making trips around the world. In a letter to geographer Emmanuel de Margerie, Kahn framed the project thusly: "I would like to put these devices to use so as to fix, once and for all, the aspects, practices, and modes of human activity of which the fatal disappearance is only a matter of time."<sup>10</sup> Described in such a way, *Les Archives de la Planète* resonates with salvage ethnography, a mode of ethnographic practice that perceives its subject of study as pure and fragile, always and necessarily on the brink of death.<sup>11</sup> Through written and visual accounts, salvage ethnography tries to preserve the world's cultures before Western influence corrupts them. However, Kahn's two-tiered, multi-operator approach did not divide and "fix" the world as seamlessly as he imagined.

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<sup>9</sup> For a concise history of autochrome photography in France, see Natalie Boulouch's "The Documentary Use of the Autochrome Process in France," *History of Photography* 18 (Summer 1994): 143-144.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Mariel Jean-Brunhes Delamarre and Jeanne Beausoleil, "Deux témoins de leur temps: Albert Kahn et Jean Brunhes," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde* (Boulogne: Musée Albert Kahn, Département des Hauts-de-Seine, 1993): 92.

<sup>11</sup> The most famous of salvage ethnographers, Edward S. Curtis, framed his Native American ethnography with much the same language of urgency and loss: "The information that is to be gathered [...] respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind, must be collected at once or the opportunity will be lost." See Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian* (Seattle: Edward S. Curtis, 1907). For a detailed history of salvage ethnography, see Jacob Gruber "Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist, New Series* 72, no. 6 (December 1970): 1289-1299.

This chapter will examine the structure of *Les Archives de la Planète*, as well as the concept of visual totality underlying it. The structure of the archive is defined by two sets of divisions. The first pertains to the visual media that Kahn selected: autochrome photography and film. The second divide distinguishes the archive's *domestic* and *expedition* collections. Roughly half of the archive's photographs and films represent France, while the other half represents an often unidentifiable "other" geography. In the domestic collection, the photographs capture motionless detail and the films capture moving subjects. However, in the expedition collection, one cannot easily read the autochromes as stillness and the films as motion. The two forms collide with one another, mimic each other, and complicate any understanding of totality or visual knowledge. In its inclusion of both forms of visual representation, *Les Archives de la Planète* raises many of the same ontological and temporal questions that began to surface in Chapter One. Like the Lumière *vues*, the Kahn archive straddles the divide between photography and cinema, stillness and mobility. The expedition collection pushes the boundaries of visual simultaneity. Rather than a mere "photographic residue" or "mummified layer," the expedition collection exhibits a radical inversion or exchange of forms. It likewise generates fascinating sites of resistance and subversion, challenging its domestic counterpart and certain of the project's foundational philosophies. For Kahn, the combination of photography and film embodied the possibility of a perfect visual union, a union whose wholeness seemed to guarantee the wholeness and near-perfect visibility of the places and bodies his project aimed to represent. However, in the context of elsewhere, photography and film become uncertain, experimental forms. Rather than photographic portraits and cinematic action, the expedition collection presents motionless films and photographic movements. *Les Archives de la Planète* creates a strange record of time passing, of

duration, of emptiness. Its geographic halves correspond to separate ways of seeing and signifying the world.

This chapter will also push against the hermetic boundaries that have largely protected *Les Archives de la Planète* from coming into contact with its own historical context. To be sure, the kind and quantity of images, as well as the sheer duration of the project make it an unprecedented ethnographic undertaking. The metal gates and access codes, as well as the laudatory tones that often characterize the property's forefathers, do little to diminish this sense of precious singularity. The present-day Kahn museum, which organizes several exhibitions of archival materials each year and publishes a number of official publications dedicated to Kahn and his partner in the archives, Jean Brunhes, resists tying the project to any kind of colonial, ethnographic, or avant-garde inheritance. The museum operates as a memorial to Kahn, foregrounding his idealism, philanthropy, and pacifism. Neither Kahn nor Brunhes would have defined their project as political, ethnographic, or experimental. However, the archive's films and photographs undermine these denials, as well those implicitly issued by the museum. *Les Archives de la Planète* most certainly participates in the distinctly ethnographic desire to see other bodies and spaces, to examine these differences, and to record one's encounter. Moreover, the image of the saintly and selfless Kahn, committed to a world of peace, harmony, and mutual respect, frequently contradicts the professional milieu in which he worked, as well as the explicit colonial and ethnographic undertones of *Les Archives de la Planète*. As Sam Rohdie points out, it was the French banking and industrial sectors that pressured the French government to develop a comprehensive colonial policy in the late 1880s.<sup>12</sup> Though *Les Archives de la Planète* did not profit directly from colonialism, one could

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<sup>12</sup> See Sam Rohdie, "Geography, Photography, The Cinema: *Les Archives de la Planète*," (September 1998), <http://www.haussite.net/haus.0/SCRIPT/txt2000/01/geoall.HTML>

certainly argue that it was funded by colonial profits. If one reviews the catalogue of available films and autochromes, the overwhelming majority of them were shot in France, French colonies, or countries of economic interest to France. Kahn's ties to one of the most important French financial institutions determined, in large part, the destinations and eased the operators' access to them.

Implicit in my claim that *Les Archives de la Planète* belongs beneath the umbrella of "early visual ethnography" is a challenge to previous understandings of the term. This challenge guides my entire dissertation. As I outline in my introduction, traditional histories of visual ethnography and non-fiction film gloss over the first three decades of cinema to posit *Nanook of the North* (1922) as the first ethnographic documentary. This gesture conceals other visual projects, other forms of ethnographic film, and other important threads in early cinema, non-fiction film, and visual ethnography. An oversimplified and rigid genre is posited where none, in fact, exists. Furthermore, analyses of early ethnographic cinema frequently adopt the lens of ideology—be it colonialism, voyeurism, fetishism, etc.—as the means by which to read and understand its contents. In this way, an uneven distribution of power between the operators and their subjects often defines early visual ethnography and determines the boundaries of what these images can communicate. The impulse to capture, control, dissect, and dismiss motivates many ethnographic projects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including *Les Archives de la Planète*. Both Kahn and Brunhes made claims to scientific objectivity. They entrusted image production to men from France's most prestigious academic institutions and limited archival access to an elite coterie of artists, philosophers, and statesmen. Ideology offers an important way to begin framing the archive and understanding its development. However, *Les Archives de la Planète* ultimately exceeds these boundaries. The political and philosophical investments of the project's founders



cannot be distilled into a single ideological thread, nor can any complex network of ideologies wholly explain the images that actually emerge, the visual refusals and failures, the ontological inversions and startling experiments with temporality, duration, and human perception. The search for unfamiliar places and people joins distinct philosophies of totality and perception, experimentations with new visual technologies, and an industrial approach to image production. The Kahn archive lacks discursive and textual coherence and exemplifies the kind of practices that define early visual ethnography. In the pages that follow, I offer a more detailed sketch of the archive, including its founders and formation, before shifting to a close analysis of the visual and theoretical divisions that shape *Les Archives de la Planète*.

*The Ethnography of Duration: Kahn, Brunhes, and Géographie Humaine*

Concrete preparations for *Les Archives de la Planète* began in earnest upon Kahn's return from his excursion with Dutertre. In 1912, at the recommendation of his close friend and confidant, Henri Bergson, Kahn hired the human geographer and photography-enthusiast Jean Brunhes as the director of *Les Archives de la Planète*. Brunhes had just published *La Géographie humaine: Essai de classification positives. Principes et exemples*, a text that defined the discipline as dependent upon vision, patient observation, and the careful study of the earth's surfaces. Brunhes was interested in the intersection between the natural landscape and human activity. The geographies of greatest concern to Brunhes were those shaped by this encounter. In conjunction with his position at *Les Archives de la Planète*, Brunhes served as the Chair of Human Geography at the *Collège de France*, a position funded entirely by Kahn so as to instantaneously buttress *Les Archives de la Planète* with scientific authority and create a route of exchange between the archives and the academic

community in France.<sup>13</sup> Brunhes's responsibilities included hiring and training operators, developing an archival method, and maintaining the collection of photographs and films.<sup>14</sup> As was common practice for the fiercely private Kahn, and explanatory of his near-complete material absence from the very archives he developed and funded, Kahn quickly receded from the managerial forefront. Brunhes directed the form and content of *Les Archives de la Planète*, while Kahn guaranteed its financial support.

In her account of Kahn, Jeanne Beausoleil warns, "It was as though he wanted to blur the memory of his own image so as to leave the reality of his works behind. He seems, according to the evidence, to have worked hard to communicate nothing about his private life."<sup>15</sup> Though one can debate the degree to which Kahn exited from his own biography out of a sort of philanthropic gesture to his own life's works, Beausoleil aptly underscores the ironic lack of archival material available when trying to piece together a biographical portrait of the eccentric Kahn. Only one known photograph of Kahn exists (Figure 2.1). While he appears in several films shot in and around the Boulogne gardens, he quickly ducks out of view, usually at the moment when he realizes the camera is rolling and he is in frame. He refused interviews, left few written records, often funded his philanthropic works anonymously, and, as a kind of explanation for these refusals, claimed, "I work for humanity, I serve humankind."<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, a few biographical fragments exist, as do details about the projects he may have wanted to afford greater post-mortem attention.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Sophie Couëtoux, "L'enseignement: Jean Brunhes au Collège de France," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 234-237; see also Brunhes Delamarre and Beausoleil, "Deux témoins de leur temps: Albert Kahn et Jean Brunhes," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 91-107.

<sup>14</sup> See Bonhomme and Brunhes Delamarre, "La méthode des missions des *Archives de la Planète*," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 194-219.

<sup>15</sup> Beausoleil, "Un juif alsacien après 1870: Les années Marmoutier," *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Beausoleil, "Portrait en creux," *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> For biographical accounts of Kahn and Brunhes, as well as histories of their mutual projects, see *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940: réalités d'une utopie* (Boulogne: Musée Albert Kahn, Department des Hauts-de-Seine, 1995); *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde* (Boulogne: Musée Albert Kahn, Department des



Figure 2.1  
*Albert Kahn on the Balcony of his Office*  
(Paris, France, 1914, unknown photographer)

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Hauts-de-Seine, 1993); *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* 74 (2001). Like the aforementioned texts, Jeanne Beausoleil and “l’ensemble de son équipe” at the *Musée Départemental* edited this *Cinémathèque* issue.

Kahn was an Alsatian Jew, born on March 3, 1860, in Marmoutier. After completing studies at the *Collège de Saverne* in 1876, he moved to Paris and began working for the Goudchaux bank. In 1879, he met Henri Bergson, his tutor for the Baccalaureate exam. Bergson remained a lifelong friend and mentor, frequently visiting him at the Boulogne property (proof of which exists in photographs and film footage from the archives). In the decade that followed, Kahn amassed a large fortune, mostly with investments in South African gold and diamonds.<sup>18</sup> By 1892, he was the director of the Goudchaux bank. Despite Kahn's enormous wealth, Alain Petit famously described him as "a little old man, completely bald, with a white beard, so modestly dressed that one could have mistaken him for a humble retiree."<sup>19</sup> When the ripples of the American financial crisis reached French banks in 1930, Kahn lost a considerable portion of his fortune. The last film for *Les Archives de la Planète* was made at the *Exposition Coloniale* in Paris in 1931. Kahn died at Boulogne-Billancourt on November 14, 1940.

*Les Archives de la Planète* was only one of Kahn's many projects, intended to support French education, foster intellectual exchange and cooperation, and spread a post-Enlightenment (and post-Franco-Prussian war) message of humanism, peace, and possibility. In 1898, an "anonymous donor" began offering *Autour du Monde* scholarships to male students who had recently graduated with degrees in education.<sup>20</sup> The highly competitive awards offered 15,000 francs for world travel. This scholarship scheme would eventually dovetail with *Les Archives de la Planète*. The

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<sup>18</sup> See Gilles Baud Berthier, "Les origines de la fortune d'Albert Kahn," and "Le métier de la banque," *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Beausoleil, "Portrait en creux," *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed account of the development of the scholarship program and its history, see Nathalie Clet-Bonnet, "Les bourses *Autour du Monde*: La fondation française, 1898-1930," *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 137-152.

*boursiers* (scholarship holders) joined operators in gathering photographs and films around the world. In a letter to Louis Liard, Kahn explained the project as follows:

I hope that from this large inquest, renewed year after year, one will begin to see some very general ideas emerge, capable of usefully influencing the direction of our country's activities. Also, it was not my intention to render a service to these young men personally, to help them complete their studies or to prepare them for their scientific work. I would prefer instead that they feel invested in a type of patriotic and humanitarian mission and that they embrace it only after reflecting on the force that they are willing to put forth to fulfill it or on the means that they will use so that the greatest number of their fellow citizens will profit from it.<sup>21</sup>

Kahn's letter underscores several guiding principles, particularly his privileging of the collective good above that of the individual. At the same time, however, one cannot overlook the social hierarchy Kahn supported in the distribution of his scholarships. An overwhelming number of Kahn's scholars came from the *École Normale Supérieure*, one of the most elite universities in France. Kahn quite unabashedly entrusted his message of humanitarianism and universalism to a very small slice of French society, those he termed the "intellectual and moral elite of the nation."<sup>22</sup> As André François-Poncet enthusiastically declared in the twentieth anniversary Bulletin for the *Société Autour du Monde*, "he believed that the elite had a mission, which was precisely to orient and guide humanity's march toward tomorrow."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Brunhes Delamarre and Beausoleil, "Deux témoins de leur temps," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 100.

This reverence for the elite academic and artistic personalities of France extended to a number of Kahn's publications and projects, including the previously mentioned *Société Autour du Monde*. In 1902, the society was conceived as a way to buttress and broaden the influence of the *Autour du Monde* scholarships, to provide a space within which the experiences of the young travelers could be shared and debated with a wider public audience.<sup>24</sup> The organization's founding charter claimed that, "the members propose to work toward expanding, in France, specific knowledge of foreign countries and, in foreign countries, that of France, so as to make what one might call international civilization better understood and appreciated."<sup>25</sup> The message, however, did not reach very far. As Paula Amad explains, the group met "every Sunday for informal luncheons on Kahn's Boulogne property and opened its doors to an array of international guests from the world of politics, religion, industry, science, literature and the arts, including Rabindrath Tagore, Lord Robert Cecil, Albert Einstein, H.G. Wells, Edmund Husserl, Rudyard Kipling, Albert Thomas, Auguste Rodin, Léon Bourgeois, Marie Curie, André Michelin, Thomas Mann, and Louis Lumière, and Colette."<sup>26</sup> The regular meetings of the society soon became the only space, save Brunhes's public classroom at the *Collège de France*, in which one could catch a glimpse of the films and photographs brought back from the expeditions. Despite far-reaching aspirations for *Les Archives de la Planète*, exhibitions were limited to a few hours, each week at Boulogne-Billancourt and were reserved for a select gathering of the world's artists, intellectuals, and industrialists.

In response to a young boursier named James Dickinson, who was uncertain about what precisely was expected of him, Kahn offered an unusual assurance: "All I

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<sup>24</sup> Clet-Bonnet, "La société Autour du Monde," *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 238.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Paula Amad, "Cinema's 'sanctuary': From pre-documentary to documentary in Albert Kahn's *Archives de la Planète*," *Film History* 13 (2001): 141.

want you to do is keep your eyes open.”<sup>27</sup> Kahn’s counsel reveals the universalist core of *Les Archives de la Planète*. Not only were Dickinson’s open eyes a sufficient form of critical engagement, but also the open eyes of those who would later view the archives and interpret their contents would equally suffice. Amad succinctly articulates Kahn’s visual philosophy: “Kahn’s project brought together the neo-colonialism of the treaty of Versailles with a ‘secular Messianic’ vision of history and a universalist perception of cinema as the new visual Esperanto.”<sup>28</sup> For Kahn, the visual, recordable surfaces of the planet were a place of observable activity, essential and interpretable traces. In a letter to Brunhes, he wrote, “We must try to render an exact account of the role that diverse nations play on the surface of the globe, determine their diverse aspirations, and see where these aspirations lead them.”<sup>29</sup> Kahn thus situates the visible surface at the center of his and Brunhes’s attention. He likewise implies that this observation of the surface and the visible activities conducted thereupon occur *over time*. Kahn suggests a process, an unfolding, and the observation of movement or change. While *Les Archives de la Planète* no doubt participates in a mode of salvage ethnography, with a clearly articulated interest in capturing and fixing the images of a vanishing world, this mode was complicated by an altogether different objective. Rather than protecting the world against time and removing it from time, Kahn hoped to observe it within time, over time. Kahn’s interest in the possibilities of unfettered visual encounters, his preference for surfaces over depths, and the complex and often contradictory expectations he had for *Les Archives de la Planète* find further expression in the philosophy of Jean Brunhes. His

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Beausoleil, “Portrait en creux,” *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Amad, “Cinema’s ‘sanctuary,’” *Film History*, 146.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Brunhes Delamarre and Beausoleil, “Deux témoins de leur temps,” *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 95.

appointment as director of *Les Archives de la Planète* lends necessary support to claims regarding Kahn's visual philosophies.

According to geographer and historian Marie-Claire Robic, the discipline of human geography was not simply the product of a colonial desire to see and possess the world; it was catalyzed by the country's crushing defeat in the Franco-Prussian war.<sup>30</sup> A renewed interest in territories, boundaries, and the national identities determined by geographic demarcations influenced the education reforms of the Third Republic. The discipline itself developed out of the teaching and writings of Paul Marie-Joseph Vidal de la Blache. Brunhes was one of his disciples. While they would eventually part ways in terms of their methodologies, both Vidal and Brunhes were committed to the study of "the interaction of the physical environment, social organization and historical change in reshaping the physical surfaces of the earth, that is, in socializing the earth. This was a geography about human settlement and its physical traces, not about rivers, but about canals and dams."<sup>31</sup> This was also a discipline about vision and visible presences. As Robic explains, "The eye of the geographer replaces the memory of the historian."<sup>32</sup> Rather than plumbing the depths of historical time, geographers observed the surfaces of the present moment. Instead of digging, geographers scanned.

Brunhes's particular understanding of human geography deviated considerably from that of his mentor. Vidal focused his attention on isolated, rural regions that tended to diminish the detectible presence of man's influence.<sup>33</sup> Brunhes, by contrast, examined precisely these kinds of direct encounters between humans and the land they

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<sup>30</sup> See Marie-Claire Robic, "La géographie dans le mouvement scientifique," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Rohdie, "Geography, Photography, The Cinema," (September 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Robic, "La géographie dans le mouvement scientifique," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 59.

<sup>33</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of Brunhes's disciplinary departure from Vidal, see Didier Mendibil, "Deux manières: Jean Brunhes et Paul Vidal de la Blache," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 152-157.



inhabited, including agricultural sites, villages, and works of art and architecture.<sup>34</sup>

Whereas Vidal relied upon language to animate his descriptions, Brunhes preferred taut descriptions and photographic or filmic illustrations. One need only read a brief excerpt from one of Brunhes's lectures to recognize an utter lack of linguistic flourish, a lack that frequently veers into the realm of overly specific tedium:

The Bosnian region is, above all, very wooded. I do not mean humid. I mean very wooded. In the next lesson, you will see how a region can be well watered and very dry at the same time, as in the Herzegovina region. And so I purposefully say, "very wooded," a term which immediately brings to mind certain regions of Switzerland, sandstone Switzerland. We are in the region of sandstone, wooded with fir, spruce, many beech groves, oak groves, and in the lowest regions, willow trees.<sup>35</sup>

Here, one can detect Brunhes's efforts to foreground visual detail and to impart a kind of photographic objectivity. One can equally detect his interest in comparative geographies, as opposed to Vidal's regional monographs.

For Brunhes, a geographable fact was a visible fact. In virtue of its visibility, a geographable fact was also a photographable fact. Brunhes considered "the taking of a photograph to be an apt metaphor for the geographic act."<sup>36</sup> Insofar as human geography sought unequivocal and objective visual facts about the earth's surface, photography was the ideal mechanical supplement. Photographs doubled his words and validated his claims, with the image of the more-perfect machine eye standing in for Brunhes's fallible, human vision. And yet, the role of the photograph in Brunhes's

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Brunhes, "L'enseignement," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 243.

<sup>36</sup> Robic, "Jean Brunhes, un 'géo-photo-graphe' expert aux *Archives de la Planète*," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 109.

human geography never manages to be quite so conceptually neat. Brunhes's photography captured not only the "objective" visual encounter between landscape and human activity, but also the less visible, subjective encounter between man and photographic machine. In joining the geographic with the photographic, Brunhes elevated the geographic to the heights of photographic objectivity. At the same time, he inflected the photograph with the "geographic act," with a *human* subject, viewing a landscape at a particular time and in a particular place. If one simply considers *Les Archives de la Planète*—the personalities of Kahn and Brunhes, the scholarship program, the kinds of dialogue invited by the *Société Autour du Monde*—the images contained therein were circumscribed by human presence from the project's inception.

Brunhes joined Kahn in his fascination with duration, movement, and change. Geographies contain the traces of time, development, and human progress. Even in the present moment, landscapes confess the past (be it days, years, or centuries). And while geographers depart from historians to scan the earth's surface, that surface contains a complex temporal depth. In his discussion of *paysage* and human geography, Bertrand Lemartinel explains, "Landscape [paysage] is not simply the product of a look [regard]; it is the concrete reality of pathways on which we exhaust ourselves in trying to make progress."<sup>37</sup> Brunhes wanted to observe geographies over time. He hoped to capture change and duration as they were permanently inscribed upon the earth's surfaces *and* as they unfolded in the present moment and opened out onto the future. The layering of photography and cinema upon this process of observation further complicates Brunhes's geography, as well as any effort to read the visual contents of the archives. *Les Archives de la Planète* observes, records, and refashions time-inscribed geographies with time-contingent visual technologies.

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<sup>37</sup> Bertrand Lemartinel, "Le paysage des géographes français au temps d'Albert Kahn," *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* 74 (2001): 65.

These investments in temporal depth and duration—shared by both Kahn and Brunhes—invite us to attend to this process of “refashioning,” to the forms of temporality that emerge across the archive in both its photographs and films.

Over the last decade, a small collective of scholars have tried to find a point of entry into *Les Archives de la Planète*. Toward this end, Paula Amad and Sam Rohdie have contributed some of the most thoughtful and inventive analyses of this unusual photo-film archive. In her seminal essay, “Cinema’s ‘sanctuary’: From pre-documentary to documentary in Albert Kahn’s *Archives de la Planète*,” Amad argues that the film archive straddles a nearly twenty-five year period of cinema history and reflects a number of developments in non-fiction filmmaking, from “a heterogeneous film tradition based on individual shots loosely organized into a succession of views” to “a more clearly articulated genre based on a tightly edited arrangement of shots in the service of a more pronounced argument or narrative.”<sup>38</sup> Amad ultimately scales back her claims about the archive’s historical reach and grounds the great majority of its moving images within the boundaries of pre-documentary film and what Tom Gunning describes as an “aesthetic of the view.” For Amad, the archive’s largely unedited film footage engages in “monstrative” displays of the earth’s surfaces. That is, unlike later, more sophisticated documentary forms, they fail to make explicit claims or arguments about those surfaces on display and instead offer their contents as easily perceptible and comprehensible visual curiosities. This assessment of the archives likewise draws upon André Gaudreault’s theorizations of early film, which I discuss in Chapter One.

Rather than attending to the formal qualities of the films, Rohdie reads the archive as part of a larger set of textual practices and interdisciplinary encounters. In his 1997 lecture to the Royal Geographical Society in Hong Kong, Rohdie takes what

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<sup>38</sup> Amad, “Cinema’s ‘sanctuary,’” *Film History*, 148.

he terms a “digression” from *Les Archives de la Planète* to outline three moments in which cinema, photography, painting, writing, geography, and ethnography come together: (1) the post-1830 literature of the “voyage” (2) Michel Leiris and the surrealist autobiographies of the 1920s, and (3) André Gide’s *Voyage au Congo*. His digression indirectly positions *Les Archives de la Planète* as a fourth site of cultural collision. In *Promised Lands: Cinema, Geography, Modernism*, Rohdie expands upon these initial digressions and sketches several more.<sup>39</sup> He structures the text as perpetual digression, a breathtaking collection of intertextual discoveries upon which he maps his own personal—one might say “Leirisian”—human geography. Although Rohdie’s digressive and near-ludic approach positions the archive alongside a number of open and experimental works, he contrasts these efforts to recontextualize the archive with what he perceives to be its original and naïve visual mission, articulated by both Kahn and Brunhes. Rohdie thus erects a clear divide between early forms of visual ethnography, including *Les Archives de la Planète*, and the more self-reflexive and deconstructive ethnographic experiments of Michel Leiris and Jean Rouch.

Perhaps in virtue of the sheer enormity of the archive, Kahn scholarship tends to either privilege the film footage or ignore the content of the images altogether. No one, to my knowledge, engages the totality, be it the concept underlying the project, or the very totality of *both* media that quite literally constitutes the archives. Sam Rohdie comes closest in his efforts to recontextualize the project as a site of historical, visual, and disciplinary play. But he substitutes analysis of the archival contents with a kind of postmodern re-imagining of the original visual expeditions. Perhaps by way of explanation for this omission, he claims that every autochrome “is an image of a generality. Not a single image of the thousands of the Archives [sic] autochromes I

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<sup>39</sup> See Rohdie, *Promised Lands: Cinema, Geography, Modernism* (London: The British Film Institute, 2001).

viewed startled me or arrested my attention as photographs.”<sup>40</sup> Rohdie thus eliminates the need for specificity: the images are themselves nothing more than generalities. While Amad explicitly acknowledges the need to consider the films “in relation to these complementary documents [autochrome photographs],” she ultimately asserts that cinema better suited Kahn’s project and thereby eschews any kind of comparative work with the autochrome images.<sup>41</sup> In seeming agreement with Rohdie, Amad claims that the photographs offer little more than interesting variations on the “type.” For her part, Fatimah Tobing Rony dismisses both the photographs and the films at once. The photographs, though lovely “snapshot jewels,” receive little more than a sentence or two of description. The films are “less arresting. Life in front of the camera passes quickly; the films do not allow for meditation or contemplation.”<sup>42</sup> In this chapter, I consider both forms of media and both sides of the archive’s geographic divide. In doing so, the films become far more than illustrations of early non-fiction film categories. They constitute part of a visual experiment wherein unfamiliar geographies invited new ways of seeing the world and shaping its contents. Moreover, and in sharp contrast to Rohdie’s assessment, the visual contents of *Les Archives de la Planète* reveal an always and already intertextual and multivocal surface.

#### *Here and Elsewhere: Photography and Film in ‘Les Archives de la Planète’*

On June 10, 1907, Auguste Lumière introduced a gathering of 600 people at the French newspaper *l’Illustration* to his newly invented autochrome process.<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>40</sup> Rohdie, “Geography, Photography, The Cinema,” (September 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Amad, “Cinema’s ‘sanctuary,’” *Film History*, 145.

<sup>42</sup> Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 80-81.

<sup>43</sup> Nathalie Boulouch, “The Documentary Use of the Autochrome in France,” *History of Photography* 18 (Summer 1994): 143. The link between Kahn and the Lumière brothers extends beyond the technological foundations of *Les Archives de la Planète*. The Kahn expedition films closely resemble the form and content of many Lumière expedition films. Though Kahn’s use of the autochrome process complicates the photographic-filmic knot that emerges in the Lumière films, both collections move between motion and stillness, presence and absence, monstration and concealment. François de la

event marked yet another Lumière brother triumph in decreasing the distance between reality and representation. Autochrome photography was the first color process available on the European and American markets. The images were developed (and in some specialty labs, still are) using glass plates coated with soot, panchromatic silver halide emulsion, and dyed potato particles, which served as color filters. The bits of potato gave the images a slight grain, but the process rendered startlingly nuanced color photographs, which really must be held in the hand and up to the light to be appreciated in all of their colorful detail. Still, the new process posed two considerable disadvantages. First, autochrome exposure took fifty times longer than that of monochrome (black and white) photography. Candid portraits or action shots simply were not possible without losing some portion of the image to a ghostly blur. Second, the glass plate images were unique and irreproducible, an ironic problem given the location of the process's debut. One could make half-tone paper reproductions, but they were expensive and mediocre when compared to their originals. Only a few publications even tried. Despite these limitations, the process went on the market the very same year. By 1909, Albert Kahn began experimenting with it, before making what would be a twenty-year investment in the technique.<sup>44</sup>

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Bretèque limits the similarities between the two projects to three qualities: (1) a photographic way of looking, (2) a totalizing approach to filmmaking (i.e. the desire to archive the entire world), and (3) a network structure of operators. For Bretèque, Kahn and the Lumières deviated more than they coincided. He argues that the Lumières were businessmen, while Kahn was a humanitarian who used cinema toward utopian ends. Bretèque also contends that the Kahn operators were more “fully immersed” in the communities that they visited. Neither the historical record, nor the actual Kahn film footage supports these claims. See Bretèque, “Les films des *Archives de la Planète* d’Albert Kahn: D’un certain regard sur le monde et sa place dans l’histoire du cinéma,” *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* 74 (2001): 137-145; see also Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>44</sup> The autochrome process itself generates the most interesting temporal feature of the Kahn collection. Rather than mere fractions of a second, each image represented a gathering of seconds in a singular, still frame. The lengthy exposure time recreated the conditions of the earliest, mid-nineteenth century photographic processes. In order to produce crisp autochrome images, subjects had to remain motionless for an excruciatingly long window of time. Moreover, the images were developed on fragile, irreproducible glass plates. In other words, the autochrome process signaled an archaic and anachronistic form of photography. It replicated the very same photographic conditions that had long since been eliminated by improvements in photographic technology, replaced by instantaneous snapshots and endlessly reproducible paper prints. These anachronistic qualities nevertheless joined the

The autochrome collection of *Les Archives de la Planète* can be divided into two categories, roughly equal in their number of autochromes and meters of film: France and elsewhere. This visual divide corresponds to what I have termed the *domestic* and *expedition* collections. The domestic autochromes represent one of three very general themes: (1) the Boulogne-Billancourt property, with a particular emphasis on the well-tended Kahn gardens in bloom, (2) Paris, and (3) rural France. Compared with the contents of the first two visual categories, images of a non-Parisian France constitute a very small portion of the collection (a few hundred autochromes and, to my knowledge, no film footage whatsoever). No matter the visual theme, the domestic autochromes very rarely contain human subjects. They are eerily empty frames, whose contents and compositions only accentuate this conspicuous absence. For example, an image entitled *Le Cercle Autour du Monde* (unknown date, unknown photographer) presents a large room in Kahn's Boulogne-Billancourt estate. The image is framed so as to capture a considerable swath of the room's hardwood floors, as well as its high walls and ceiling. Windows line the wall opposite the camera and light spills into the room. One can clearly see the bushes and trees outside. This external, natural light sharply contrasts with the shadowy interior of the unlit room, and this chiaroscuro-like effect heightens the pervading sense of absence and emptiness. In the background, a long table and chairs sits perfectly centered beneath one of the large picture windows. Behind the table, a row of chairs secures this perspectival edge. In the far right corner of the image, an overstuffed reading chair draws the viewer's eye. The image offers neither a physical *cercle* nor any glimpse of Kahn's social collective (the *Société Autour du Monde* was also referred to as the

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lifelike, vibrant, and ultramodern coloring of the autochrome image itself. For viewers at the beginning of the twentieth century, the encounter with the autochrome image was a paradoxical combination of past and present, the old-fashioned and the cutting-edge. For a history of autochrome photography and other color processes, see Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982): 276-278.

*Cercle*). Rather, the image presents sheer, unpopulated emptiness. Empty room. Empty tables. Empty chairs. One gets the distinct feeling of having missed the title's promised (human) activity. The gathering has left the house for the gardens and cut the lights before their departure. Viewers might be tempted to read these kinds of human absences as evidence of the autochrome process's technical restraints. A small number of individual and group portraits refute this explanation, as do the expedition autochromes, which I will soon describe.

This remarkable lack of human subjects likewise characterizes the images of Paris. These are not the images of the everyday, nor are they images of a particular event in the city. No people sitting in cafés or brasseries. No couples or families in parks. Nearly no images that might even remotely bring to mind the modern bustle of a turn-of-the-century European city. The domestic autochromes instead convey an apocalyptic, post-human, impossible Paris. A vacant city made all the more strange by their utterly modern and perfectly rendered color. Examples abound, including *La Place de la Bourse* (5 June 1914, Georges Chevalier) and *Le Moulin Rouge* (June-July 1914, Stéphane Passet). The latter image was prominently featured in advertising materials for the *Paris en couleurs* exhibition, posted throughout the city in the winter of 2008. Both images reflect the photographers' keen attention to the colors of the city, rather than the actions and events unfolding within its boundaries. In *La Place de la Bourse*, Chevalier positions the street-side view of a newsstand in the center of the image. The back and side of the stand are covered with brightly colored advertisements, as is an enormous wall behind the stand, buttressing a row of apartments. Like *Le Cercle Autour du Monde*, the title fails to describe what the photograph actually represents. Here, the *Place* escapes and a newsstand, with its assemblage of advertisements, emerges in its stead. A vertical sliver of a column along the far right side of the image offers the only confirmation of the title's



geographic claim. Recalling the empty tables and chairs of *Le Cercle Autour du Monde*, the contents of the image emphasize the awkward lack of human subjectivity. A newsstand with no readers. Advertisements with no consumers. The play between the sidewalk grays and greens and the posters in their vibrant and multiple colors serves as the only real visual presence in the image.

Similarly, *Le Moulin Rouge* features the infamous Pigalle institution, its large red windmill sharply contrasting with the deep blue posters affixed to either side of the entrance. They read, “MOULIN ROUGE—LA REVUE, CACHE TON NU.” Passet positions his camera at an angle to the entrance, foregrounding the street and sidewalk, and lending the image a perspectival depth. Both of these examples are beautiful, precisely composed images, as is nearly every autochrome in the Paris collection. The city’s best features were chosen, its most impressive monuments and its most colorful corners. Rarely does a human body disrupt the motionless plasticity of the city. When considering the domestic portion of the autochrome collection, Rony’s description of the images as “snapshot jewels” registers as particularly apt. The Paris of *Les Archives de la Planète* contains no signs of poverty, filth, or prostitution. One of the bawdiest sites in the city appears a family-friendly splash of reds and blues. The archive transforms the city into easily digestible, postcard views. Its disorderly buzz is tranquilized, refigured in sharp lines of juxtaposition and neat rows of chairs, the only hint of its dynamism embodied by shouts of color.

The autochromes of Paris also feature several aerial shots of the city. Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, also known as Nadar, famously took the very first aerial photographs in 1858 while hovering over Paris in a hot-air balloon. One of Brunhes’s contemporaries, Albert Demangeon described the development of aerial photography as one of the most “precious contributions to the study of the earth’s terrain and rural

landscapes.”<sup>45</sup> With photographers suspended high above their subjects, the technique ushered in a new wave of testimonials regarding mechanical vision, disembodied perspective, and photographic objectivity. The aerial photographs of Paris in *Les Archives de la Planète* participate in this discourse. The city becomes a semi-abstract network of roads and rooftops, and the utter absence of human subjects at last makes sense. At the same time, these aerial photographs often underscore the presence of the photographer and the very French innovations that made this photographic presence and aerial perspective possible. Take, for example, *Panorama pris de la tour Eiffel en direction des Invalides* (unknown date, Stéphane Passet). Although the title seemingly doubles the content of the image (anyone familiar with the city could probably identify the baroque dome of the *Hôtel Nationale des Invalides* without much verbal assistance), it also acknowledges the presence of a photographer, notes his precise location at the moment when the image was taken, and gestures toward the very act of “taking” a photograph, of photographic representation itself. The title also alerts the viewer to an almost narrative line of sight. The image was taken atop the *tour Eiffel*, which, at that historical moment, was the most recent architectural addition to the city’s skyline and an iconic embodiment of France’s industrial strength and cultural significance. The camera’s viewfinder (and the photographer’s gaze) points toward the dome of the *Invalides*, where the remains of Napoleon were interred in 1840. The gaze of the photograph, from *tour Eiffel* to *Invalides*, becomes a kind of back-and-forth movement between past and present sites of French influence, a movement which the title explicitly grounds in a third “site” of French cultural identity: the photographic image.

Despite their obvious visual departure from the more common, street shots of the city, the aerial autochromes of Paris nevertheless visually coincide with the

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Olivier Kuhlen, “Le renouvellement technique,” *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 301.

remainder of the French collection in a number of ways. In *Panorama pris de la tour Eiffel en direction des Invalides*, a clear diagonal stretches from the bottom left corner of the frame to the midpoint on the right side of the image. Neatly organized rows of buildings occupy the upper left quadrant (these rows also coincide with the directional divide of the image); green grass and trees occupy the bottom right. A perfectly even sliver of blue sky lines the upper edge, framing the buildings and grass below. The only visual interruption is the golden dome of the *Invalides*. It breaks from the neat rows of buildings and pierces the blue sky above. Much like the carefully framed rows of chairs or the perfectly centered *Moulin Rouge*, bordered on either side by advertisements, this image abides a modern sense of composition, guided by clean lines and repetition (of tables/chairs, posters, buildings, etc.). And much like the bursts of color which define the French collection of autochromes and organize their visual contents, the aerial image of the *Invalides* presents a striking color contrast: the grey of the city's streets and buildings against the green of the *Champ des Mars*. Two perfect, visual halves, highlighted in blue. The golden dome of the *Invalides* bursts forth, a small and purposeful visual distraction.

By contrast, the expedition autochromes represent a world of bodies and movements. For a number of Kahn scholars, including Rohdie and Amad, the expedition autochromes furnish little more than staid ethnographic types. A quick glance through the collection yields *prima facie* evidence for this assessment. While the domestic collection contains a small number of portraits, these images bear little resemblance to the more "exotic" human subjects that populate the expedition autochromes. The domestic portraits crop the subject from the waist up and limit the content almost exclusively to the subject's face and head. Rather than a representative range of the country's population, these portraits honor France's wealthy intellectual and cultural elite (a very male-dominated crowd at the turn of the century). The

subjects wear dark-colored suits and pose before non-descript and neutral colored cloth backgrounds. By contrast, the portraits of non-European subjects implement a familiar ethnographic lexicon. In these images, subjects don traditional costumes and pose for vertical, full-body portraits. The photographs are set outdoors, in the “wild” of subjects’ native environments. A human body or a desert dune: the photograph transforms both the individual and the inanimate into objects of interest and evidence of authenticity. Rather than proper names, titles for these autochromes describe ethnicities, geographic locations, or, on some occasions, trades (i.e. weaver, shepherd, healer, etc.). Men, women, and children all step before the lens, though most of these portraits rely upon gendered tropes of desire and danger.

*Jeune fille Mauresque* (16 June 1929, Frederic Gadmer, Algeria) and *Bédouin d’origine Soudanaise* (14 March 1918, Paul Castelnau, Arabia) typify expedition portraiture. In the first image, a beautiful woman poses against a backdrop of flowers in shades of red, orange, and yellow, as well as a picturesque clay wall. The flowers match her headscarf and the dress she wears, its straps sliding down her shoulders. She faces the camera, but casts her gaze outward, past the frame, beyond the viewer; one can consume her image without any visual impediments. In *Bédouin d’origine Soudanaise* a large man sits among rocks in the desert. He wears an elaborate costume, complete with a beige suit, a black cape, and a red headdress. He stares directly into the camera, his huge figure filling the frame. Whereas the posters of Paris brought colorful life to its deserted streets, in these portraits, the body of the subject becomes the site of colorful display. The “gem-like” quality of these images owes not only to the elaborate native dress, but also to the composition of the images. In both of these examples, and hundreds of others, the ethnographic body fills the frame, its colorful contours radiating against beige rocks, desert sand, and neutral

grasses. Recalling the otherworldly photographs of an empty and inanimate Paris, these portraits elide the realities of daily life. They transform the citizens of the world into an idealized and implausible rainbow. Beautiful bodies and faces. Traditional clothing worn just so.

If these portraits of racialized difference represented the visual breadth of the expedition autochromes, one would have good reason to condemn or ignore the collection, its facile divide between “us” and “them,” as well as the Orientalist fantasies that sustain this visual distinction. A simple comparison between the portraits of Parisians and the portraits of everyone else would be analysis enough. But *Les Archives de la Planète* contains some 73,000 autochrome photographs. The expedition autochromes constitute roughly one-half of the collection. Of this considerable portion, only several hundred portraits exist. One must, then, ask: What kinds of images emerge in this remainder? Many autochromes from both categories—domestic and expedition—seem destined only to supplement Brunhes’s lecture material. They capture the immobile surfaces of human geography: a bridge over a river, a collection of homes alongside a road, a man-made trail carved on a hillside, etc. However, in marked contrast to the domestic images, the expedition autochromes also experiment with action, movement, change, and duration. Sequences of sunrises and sunsets perhaps offer the simplest, and most breathtaking, of initial examples. From Lebanon to India to Turkey, over oceans and among palm trees, *Les Archives de la Planète* records the passage of time in patient, chronological scenes. Nearly every expedition site contains at least one sunrise or sunset, represented over the course of three or four autochromes. In the granular quality of the images, one does not have to leap too far to detect the influence of impressionism and its investigations of subjective perspective. In the unfolding movements of the images, one also can easily recognize a kind of photographic-cinematic collision. Inexplicably, not once does one

encounter a sunset or sunrise among the 35-millimeter film footage. This play of light and shadow was reserved for the still image.

These experimentations with movement and duration frequently reveal a subjective presence and an embodied photography. Indeed, many expedition autochromes represent movement and duration as experienced by an indirectly inscribed, but no less present human subject. A series of eight images from Bou Médine, Algeria (1929) explores the impressive *Grande Mosquée*. The first image represents the exterior of the mosque. The next depicts a long corridor of elaborate archways. With each succeeding image, a basic narrative develops. A walk down the hallway. A careful inspection of the columns, walls, and chandeliers. A transition from one place to another. A touristic outing. Whatever the narrative explanation, someone was there, taking photographs. Over and again, embodied movements reveal themselves. Even in the images of sunrises and sunsets, one can perceive a human presence, over time: a photographer stands in place, observing. Among the expedition autochromes, photographers cross thresholds, inspect monuments, transition from general overviews to the smallest details and back again. These images contain far more than surface geographies or racialized ethnographic “types.” They represent duration and change and what seems, at times, an almost desperate desire to capture each passing moment, each new perspective of a single visual experience.<sup>46</sup> The desires guiding Léon Busy materialize within and between several autochrome series taken during his expeditions to Indochina (present-day Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam). In a series of twelve images, entitled *Jeune fille chiquant le bétel* (May

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<sup>46</sup> If one considers these embodied photographic movements alongside the motion studies conducted by Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne Jules de Marey, the expedition autochromes present an interesting inversion. Rather than using the body as an index of movements across space and changes in time, the expedition autochromes occasionally do away with the indexical, photographable body. Changes in space—distances between objects, changes in perspective, etc.—mark bodily movements over time. For a rich discussion of time and motion study photography, see Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 33-68.

1916, Léon Busy, Indochina), Busy photographs a very young girl in close-up, seated at a table. She slowly chews, her mouth opens and closes, and the betel plant imparts a bright red pigment to her lips and tongue. In another series of seven autochromes, collectively entitled *Jeune femme revêtant le costume traditionnel* (1926-28, Léon Busy, Indochina) viewers encounter a naked girl gradually pulling up her hair and putting on a ceremonial robe.<sup>47</sup>

Many of the expedition autochromes fail to fit neatly within the category of human geography or even reflect its directors' shared interests in continuity, duration, and change. Despite the limitations of the autochrome format, one finds images of events in the midst of their unfolding. These images register as incomplete slices of a temporal flow that continues (or continued) elsewhere. In the Mongolia collection, to take but one small selection of examples, representations of action and activity, of abrupt temporal excisions, exist in abundance. One image, entitled *Le supplice d'une femme condamnée à mort pour adultère* (25 July 1913, Stéphane Passet, Mongolia) is one of the most disturbing images in the entire autochrome collection. One only needs to consider the title to understand the ways in which this image departs from other photographs in the archives. Rather than labeling an object or human type, the title describes an event. It signals a distinct effort to mobilize the image, to make it move. The photograph itself captures an event, a brief slice of space and time: a woman screams and slowly dies.<sup>48</sup> Of course, viewers see none of this suffering as it unfolds

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<sup>47</sup> François de la Bretèque argues that these images reveal vital ethnographic knowledge about the processes involved in getting dressed and undressed. See Bretèque, "Les films des Archives de la Planète d'Albert Kahn," *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, 143.

<sup>48</sup> This image belongs to an expansive field of photographic representations of death, execution, and torture. In the nineteenth century, the photographic camera captured phantom spirits, victims of war, and dead children. Deathbed photography became a commercial industry akin to that of portraiture. One studio advertised its services thusly: "Secure the shadow 'ere the substance fade / Let nature imitate what nature made." For a discussion of photography and the macabre, see Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) and Rolf H. Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow, The Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena: An Historical Survey* (New York: Nazraeli

over time. What they can see is a green field, a clear blue sky, and a brown box, centered in the foreground of the frame. There is a small hole on the side of the box. A portion of a woman's head, hair, and arm extend out of that hole. The woman holds the lock to her small prison in a futile attempt at escape. Two small, empty bowls are discarded on the ground, alongside small bits of colored cloth.

Several images in the Mongolia collection share in the content, composition, and tone of this particular autochrome. A prisoner with his neck and arms locked in a wooden plank. A man with an enormous chain draped about his neck. A half-lit cell, with multiple eyes turned back upon the camera, including those of the prison guard. While the subjects in all of these images are motionless, they are not flattened examples of their race or métier, nor are they decontextualized representations of some nondescript space and time. Considered within the context of *Les Archives de la Planète*, these photographs communicate in a very different way. People act and receive the actions of others. Subjects feel, scream, and suffer. Individually considered, both the form and content of these images disturb the viewer. They also disturb *Les Archives de la Planète*. They pierce the polished rainbow veneer and the sturdy geographic samples. Very particular times, places, events, and even people enter the frames. They are perhaps the kind of arresting images that Rohdie was looking for, but never managed to encounter. Beyond these striking presences, these ruptures of an otherwise idealized and unspecified place and time, another complex temporal layer obtains in the Mongolia collection. Taken together, this sequence of prison photographs traces Stéphane Passet's tour of the prison camp. The series indirectly records human presence and movement over time.

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Press, 1994). For a discussion of deathbed photography, see Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999). For a meditation on the intimate link between visual representation and images of death and torture, see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003). I discuss animal executions and the hunt film at length in Chapter Three.



The Kahn film collection mirrors the geographic division that organizes and informs the autochrome images. The expedition footage lacks the perceptible presences that shape the expedition autochromes, as well as the domestic film collection.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the domestic films conform to the conventions of actuality filmmaking. They document newsworthy events and human presence: state visits, inaugurations, celebrations, strikes, and the aftermath of natural disasters and accidents. In many ways, these films serve as the “active” complement to the passive autochrome images. The photographs set the stage, while the films contain the real dramatic activity of the city. For example, a short film entitled *Paris: Inondations* (1924) captures Paris in an unusual state of chaos: following heavy rains in late December, the Seine overflowed its banks. The film offers a quick montage of images: several still shots of Paris’ flooded streets, multiple pans of the Seine and its waters rapidly flowing, traveling shots of shops and homes taken from a boat in the flood waters, still shots of water reaching the tops of trees, lampposts, and bridges, and a final still shot of a father and son rowing past the camera. As I describe, the film includes multiple cuts and a selection of steady, traveling, and panning shots. The rapidity with which this wide range of visual and editing techniques emerges and dissipates lends an additional layer of motion to an already active visual content (flowing waters, bodies in boats, etc.). *Inondations* lasts a brief, but captivating three minutes. Another film, entitled *Mi-Carême* (1922), documents a parade during the carnivalesque celebration of the third week of Lent, complete with elaborate floats and

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<sup>49</sup> Part of this difference owes to Kahn’s distinct approach to gathering domestic footage. Each day, Kahn clipped articles from a series of newspapers and assembled them into reports, which he called “bulletins.” These bulletins either accompanied the footage that had already been shot or determined what would be filmed in the days to come. Most of the Kahn bulletins describe French current events. While an international crisis might have ignited Kahn’s interest in a particular region of the world, few films from the international missions reveal anything resembling events or even human activity. For a discussion of the relationship between text and image in the domestic film collection, see Jeanne Beausoleil, “Les images animées dans l’oeuvre d’Albert Kahn,” *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, 6-14; Frédérique Le Bris, “De l’image et de son identification,” *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, 34-36.

masked participants. Much like *Inondations*, this film combines rapid cuts with a variety of camera movements. It opens with steady medium shots of the parade, taken from the perspective of the crowd at different heights, angles, and positions. Multiple cameramen surrounded the parade's trajectory, trying to capture a "complete" image of the action. The camera then shifts perspective, offering multiple shots of the crowd itself, in a state of frenzied celebration. *Mi-Carême* concludes with a self-reflexive shot of several men, standing on a raised platform, filming the event. Both of these films represent well-contained, definable events, shaped by active and rapidly shifting visual techniques. Both films likewise identify very particular places and historical events.

While a number of films from the domestic portion of *Les Archives de la Planète* do not seem as explicitly tied to an historically significant occasion, they are nevertheless guided by the discernible actions of human subjects. The collection contains many film records of the Boulogne-Billancourt property and the streets of Paris. Unlike the eerily unpopulated autochrome photographs, the cinematic renderings of these familiar sites actually provide some sense of what took place during meetings of the *Société Autour du Monde* and on Sunday afternoons in the *Jardin du Luxembourg*. One can witness the arrival of Kahn's guests, one after the other, and the welcoming gestures made by his team of servants as they whisked the country's "intellectual and moral elite" inside the estate. One can follow the group's post-lunch strolls along the garden paths and Kahn's desperate attempts to evade the cameras. And, one can watch children as they push boats into the *Grand Bassin*, while others ride the merry-go-round, and still others stare directly into the camera. Without supplementary details from the filmmaker, one might not know the precise day or year upon that these images were recorded, but one can easily identify very

particular actions and events as they develop on-screen. These films contribute motion, mobility, and narrative to the taciturn autochrome representations of the city.

These domestic films share very little with the expedition footage. The latter is rarely structured by human activity or coherent events. One can examine hours of footage and encounter only a handful of human silhouettes, hurriedly passing by the camera on their way to somewhere else. In the expedition films, action happens elsewhere. Off-screen. Out of frame. Rather than political inaugurations, celebrations, or activities of the everyday, the constant slide of panning shots and the inevitable cut between these pans serve as the central, and often only, visual events. A brief sequence from the Palestine collection entitled *Palestine: Bethléem, documentation sur la ville* (1925) concisely models the most common visual contents and techniques of the expedition films. *Bethléem* lasts roughly four minutes and contains a total of three shots. In the first of these shots, the camera pans left to right, over the cityscape of Bethlehem. This initial pan offers a general view of the terrain: trees, homes, and a number of minarets. Shot above the city and at a considerable distance, no human subjects can be seen. In the second shot, the camera remains motionless, positioned in the middle of a busy city street and its oncoming and departing foot traffic. Notwithstanding the fixed and stable position of the camera, its proximity to the passersby and the activity of the street make it nearly impossible to identify the contents of the image, including the street itself, the stores lining its edges, or the faces of the pedestrians. This particular shot recalls a great many of the Lumière expedition films, which I study in Chapter One. The film ends with a third and final pan of a near-empty city square. Over and over again, pan after pan, the expedition films scan the visible surface. The camera operates as a ravenous voyeur, relentlessly and arbitrarily collecting visions of the world's external layers. A quick comparison between the titles of the domestic and expedition footage (*Inondations* and

*Mi-Carême* versus *Palestine, Turquie, Cambodge*, etc.) further supports this initial distinction. The titles of the domestic films describe actions, historical events, and cultural happenings, while the expedition titles posit general geographic locations, cities, and monuments.

The expedition films depict a startlingly empty and motionless planet. The majority of activity in these films emerges from the cinematic apparatus itself, from the movements of the camera and the cuts between shots. In *Cambodge: Angkor-Vat* (February, 1921), an almost 360-degree panorama of the Angkor Wat temple and its environs constitutes the entire three-minute film. But nothing happens at the temple. No prayers. No ceremonies. No one crosses the frame or moves within it. The 360-degree panorama likewise introduces the city of Istanbul in *Turquie* (1922). The visual feat of the panoramic shot is the only event in these films, the only movement upon an otherwise statuesque terrain. The actual landscapes and their inhabitants get left behind. Each passing instant brings with it a new patch of earth, but the preceding bits of dirt and architectural form pass far too quickly. The films transform the reality of these geographies into an illegible and unpopulated blur. The camera moves, but the landscape itself remains monotonous, empty, and unchanged. In their stillness, the expedition films evoke the otherworldly emptiness and calm of the Paris autochromes. Like the disquietingly vacant sidewalk in front of the *Moulin Rouge*, something about these moving images, lacking in motion, seems amiss. An important quality nevertheless distinguishes the expedition films from the domestic autochromes: duration. The expedition films take time and scan the earth. They temporalize stretches of unchanging and inactive space.

From the very first expedition, the films were produced as documentary materials for an archive underway. They were intended to neatly align with their geographic labels, allowing an easy slide from title to image and back again.

However, the actual visual contents of the expedition films fail to establish the kind of spatial specificity that the titles seem to promise. The footage of Albania, Greece, Turkey, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco (to name only a few), contains innumerable panning shots of city and village skylines, as well as empty village streets and market squares. The camera rarely stops its continual, horizontal movements to pause on a particular monument, individual, or activity. Pan. Cut. Pan. Cut. Without preexisting visual knowledge of these locations, one would be hard-pressed to distinguish between the fast-moving pans of the rocky cliffs of Albania, Greece, and Turkey or those of the desert palms in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. This constantly shifting survey simply does not allow viewers to orient themselves in any of these landscapes. Moreover, rarely does the actual footage betray the date in which it was filmed. The expedition films contain few signs of the kinds of historical events for which Kahn would have clipped articles from the daily papers. In most cases, the films could have been shot anytime between 1909 and 1931. The places and spaces of the expedition films do not exist in the same historical time as their Parisian counterparts. The expedition films represent a world where nothing takes place, where nothing ever changes. In their seemingly limitless pans, the expedition films exemplify what Johannes Fabian terms “schizogenic time.”<sup>50</sup> Different spaces correspond to different temporalities. “We” dwell in the historical present, in moments of change and activity. “They” dwell in a timeless present or pre-historic past, unaffected by the shocks and tremors of modernity. Time stretches out, an infinite expanse of geography.

The domestic autochrome images and 35-millimeter films neatly adhere to the roles that Kahn assigns to photography and film. Though fraught with unsettling

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<sup>50</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press: 1983): 1-35.

absences, the photographic images represent but one half of a larger, more vibrant visual whole. The photographs manage stillness, while the films make movement visible. In the autochromes, Paris appears colorful, sculptural, unpeopled. In the films, the city becomes a bustling epicenter of politics and culture. One medium represents spaces, places, and settings; the other represents change, duration, and even narrative forms. This division does not function nearly as seamlessly among the expedition autochromes and films. The expedition collection refuses what one might term the “ontological” or essential qualities of photography and cinema, as they are defined by Kahn and Brunhes, manifest in the domestic portion of the archives, and even theorized in studies of photography and film. In the expedition archive, photography and cinema fail to operate as unobtrusive means to a visual end of stillness and motion, setting and action, color and gray. The expedition archive unites beneath an altogether different kind of visual project, a different totality, grounded in the representation of duration and human perception, as well as the metaphysics of Henri Bergson. In this way, the expedition collection resists certain of its founders’ guiding philosophies, along with the early ethnographic practice of visual “capture” and the expressions of loss and urgency with which salvage ethnography is frequently associated. In what follows, I examine the visual inversions that divide the expedition collection, as well as the visual forms that ultimately undergird its coherence. I conclude my analysis with a brief discussion of how we might understand the division between the domestic and expedition collections, which the archive never manages to bridge.

*Expedition In Total: Ontology, Temporality, Experimentation*

Any analysis of the inversions that characterize the expedition collection requires some discussion of the ontology of photography and cinema, of their essential and

shared features. In its simplest and earliest expression, the photographic process captures a single image on reproducible paper, irreproducible metal, or irreproducible glass. The image is at once spatial and temporal. It represents specific objects, places, and individuals, guaranteed to have passed before the lens, and it represents these contents at a particular moment in time. The unmanipulated photographic image assures only that its contents existed in the world at some moment in the past. In Chapter One, I discuss the spectral qualities that circumscribe the photographic image, beginning with the nineteenth-century interest in all things supernatural and continuing through the twentieth century with the work of Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and André Bazin. In his reflections on the death of his mother, Barthes understands the photograph as a deeply personal encounter, always circumscribed by what has been, but no longer is. The becoming or already dead. For Sontag, the stillness of the image accounts for its unique object-ness, as well as the popular impulse to collect photographic images in albums, wallets, slide shows, and archives. Against the compelling movements of cinema, Bazin defines photography as a process of visual mummification. The representation of objects and bodies extracted and disconnected from time's continual passing emerges as one of photography's fundamental theoretical knots. This essential feature generates a distinct tension—in the photographic image, as well as the discourses that aim to describe it—between absence and presence. The photographic image guarantees that something or someone once was, but it makes no claims about the present. The photograph can only promise past presences. In opposition to Walter Benjamin's reading of the endlessly reproducible photograph as the death-knell for the aura of art, I would argue that the phantoms of an irretrievable past constitute a *kind* of aura, if not that of a religious relic or an eighteenth-century oil painting. This alternative, photographic aura seems

all the more possible in the case of the delicate and irreproducible glass autochromes, a photographic process that Benjamin never addresses.

The two processes—photography and cinema—are ontologically joined. Relying upon the very same chemical processes as photography, the film camera records a series of still frames on a strip of celluloid. The Kahn operators used the Lumière brothers' *cinématographe* and nitrate-based celluloid. Cinema likewise shares in the indexicality of the photographic image. The presence of individuals or objects on film guarantees that they existed in reality, in “real” time, even if that segment of reality happens to coincide with an elaborate set for a fictional film.<sup>51</sup> In his film theory, Siegfried Kracauer writes that film, “is essentially an extension of photography and therefore shares with this medium a marked affinity with the visible world around us. Films come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality.”<sup>52</sup> Christian Metz similarly frames cinema as a photographic process. As he describes it, “Film ‘includes’ photography: cinema results from an addition of perceptive features to those of photography. In the visual sphere, the important addition is, of course, movement and the plurality of images, of shots.”<sup>53</sup> Like photography, film represents a temporal and spatial slice. And, mirroring the complexities of photographic representation, a spatial and temporal gap emerges between reality and its representation on film. As I explore in Chapter One, Bazin refers to this phenomenon as “change mummified.” However, in the act and space of projection, cinema “comes into its own.” In its movements and multiple shots, cinema

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<sup>51</sup> The indexicality of the film image influenced a set of arguments in the 1970s that described all film as non-fiction film. See Richard Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (New York: EP Dutton and Co., 1973). Noël Carroll convincingly responds to the loss of firm distinctions between non-fiction and fictional filmmaking in his essay, “From Real to Reel: Entangled in Nonfiction Film,” *Philosophic Exchange* (1983): 5-46.

<sup>52</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: Redemption of Physical Reality*, ed. Miriam Hansen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): xlviii.

<sup>53</sup> Christian Metz, “Photography and Fetish,” *October* 34 (Autumn 1985): 83.



conceals its foundational stillness or mummification. Bazin attributes this evasion to a subjective or spectatorial desire to enjoy the movements of the image, no matter how mummified they may be. Conceived in such a way, the central ontological feature of cinema hinges upon an encounter or experience that unfolds between the viewer and the image, the spectator and the screen.

The distinctions between photographic and cinematic modes of reception extend beyond the Bazinian notion of spectatorial faith. As Metz writes, “The photograph, inexhaustible reserve of strength and anxiety, shares, as we see, many properties of the fetish (object), if not directly of fetishism (as activity),” whereas, in film, “things are too unstable and there are too many of them on the screen. It is not simple—although still possible, of course—depending on the character of each spectator—to stop and isolate one of these objects, to make it able to work as a fetish. Most of all, a film cannot be touched, cannot be carried and handled: although the actual reels can, the projected film cannot.”<sup>54</sup> The qualities of the photographic image—stillness, reproducibility, size, affordability—make it a unique visual object, well suited for intimate, individual consumption, production, or, in Barthes’s experience, mourning. Here, Metz and Sontag coincide. Photographs can be tucked in pockets, wallets, hidden in the pages of books. Viewers linger over them, collect them in albums, show them to others. Unless published or exhibited in a museum—and even these contexts do not present totalizing limitations—viewers have a great deal of control over the photographic image. The photograph contains images of the objects, individuals, and experiences one desires (or desires to return to) and, in turn, it can become an object of desire. Many argue that film does not offer the same kind of encounter between viewer and image, particularly in its earliest manifestations. Films

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

could not be coveted, nor collected in quite the same way and the viewing experience was necessarily shared.<sup>55</sup>

These realist ontologies of photography and film omit a number of important contributions, both actual and theorized. At many points in film history, from the first wave of the avant-garde to the influx of experimental cinema after World War II, filmmakers and film movements played with the material conditions of film, bringing the still frame to the fore and purposefully calling attention to the processes underlying film production. Moreover, some of the earliest theorizations of twentieth-century urban life and visual culture, including those of Walter Benjamin, Dziga Vertov, and Sergei Eisenstein, interpret cinema as a potentially radical and redemptive medium, capable of shocking viewers out of their immersive visual slumber. For proponents and creators of montage cinema, the film image should never soften the tension of the photographic image, nor aim to resemble or recreate the material world. Vertov writes, “Until now we have violated the movie camera and forced it to copy the work of our eye. And the better the copy, the better the shooting was thought to be. Starting today, we are liberating the camera and making it work in the opposite direction. Away from copying.”<sup>56</sup> The *kino-eye*, as Vertov defines it, improves upon human perception, surpasses it. Cinema must make a new world out of visual fragments. It must make viewers see the world through the mechanized, industrialized vision of the film camera. In the deliberate and disruptive play with visual forms, as well as theorizations of technologically modified or improved human vision, one

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<sup>55</sup> In the case of *Les Archives de la Planète*, one encounters a rather unique set of exhibition strategies. Given the prescient, archival ambitions of the project, cinema achieved an unprecedented status as a collectible, archivable visual object (though the films could never be handled in the same way as the glass autochrome plates). Both the photographs and the films were exhibited in a collective, though not entirely public, space. The photographs were part of Brunhes’s lectures, while the films were part of Kahn’s afternoon entertainments at his Boulougne estate.

<sup>56</sup> Dziga Vertov, “On The Eleventh Year,” *The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O’Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1983): 16.

locates some of the ground that twentieth century visual experimentation and *Les Archives de la Planète* firmly share.

The European avant-garde likewise challenges the realist theories of reception that overlook or refuse the possibilities of a fetishistic or sensorial engagement with the film image. Jean Epstein's notion of *photogénie* assigns cinema the explicit task of capturing sensation and presence. Cinema ruptures the overwhelming flow of everyday imagery and makes physical contact with the body of the viewer. Similarly, Germaine Dulac considers the vision of cinema as mystically beyond the powers of human vision. She writes, "Cinema is a large eye, opened onto life, an eye more powerful than ours, an eye which sees what we cannot." Like Epstein's notion of *Photogénie*, the camera encounters the world and produces, at once, a distinctly mechanical image that somehow signifies a transcendent view, an emotional and sensorial surplus. In his essay, "Sorcery and Cinema," Antonin Artaud reiterates this interpretation of cinematic vision as somehow otherworldly and surely capable of nurturing fetishistic tendencies: "Due to the fact that [cinema] isolates objects, it endows them with a second life, one that tends to become ever more independent and to detach itself from the habitual meaning these objects have [...] At the moment the image disappears, a detail which it was thought wouldn't particularly stand out takes leave of the expression chosen for it."<sup>57</sup> Neither the operators of *Les Archives de la Planète* nor its founders were keen to dismantle the illusions of cinematic representation or harness the sensorial energies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, despite the utilitarian aims of the project, the expedition collection destabilizes the divide between photography and cinema, realism and experimentation.

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<sup>57</sup> Antonin Artaud, "Sorcery and Cinema," *Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*, ed. Paul Hammond. (New York: City Lights, 2000): 104.

The near-narrative autochrome series—including the depictions of sunrises, sunsets, disrobings, mastications, and explorations of architectural and natural phenomena—lend a cinematic layer to the collection. Many expedition autochromes fail to read as autonomous or singular images. Without their sequential context, these images translate as nothing more than visual abstraction (i.e. the corner of a wall and a swath of floor, or a fragment of a chandelier and the ceiling). Indeed, these images unfold across multiple glass plates and their legibility depends upon this multiplicity. They are part of a larger scene. These series move viewers through space and time and, unlike the expedition films, allow viewers to familiarize themselves with the geographies to which they correspond. Only the autochromes leave the external surfaces and take viewers “inside” (monuments, homes, social gatherings, etc.). Like so much early ethnographic cinema, this combination of an embodied, internal perspective, positions viewers of the autochrome images as travelers, explorers, and camera operators, penetrating the interiors of mosques, surveying the intimate corners of a family’s home, or, in the case of Busy’s images, visually consuming the contours of an individual’s body. Moreover, when one considers these autochrome series alongside the film images, the photographs function deconstructively. That is to say, despite the archive’s supposed distance from the experimental energies of the early twentieth century, the photographic series undermine the rather conventional aspirations of the documentary films. They offer a kind of “blueprint” for cinema, revealing the still images underneath its illusory representations of motion. The autochromes disrupt spectatorial faith and expose the process of mummification underway.

The photographic representation of actions, events, and human presences also marks a departure from ontological convention, as well as the domestic collection of the Kahn archive. To be sure, the sequential photographs constitute events. But, here,

I am also referring to the images from Mongolia's prison, the images from Indochina's leper colony, or, perhaps less shockingly, the image of a young boy sewing, his hands a blur of over-and-under activity. It is certainly not beyond the realm of possibilities that a photograph would represent prisoners, lepers, or bodies frozen in motion. However, within the context of *Les Archives de la Planète* this does seem a strange displacement. The photographs provide the only consistent sign of human existence, of the events of the everyday, and of the shock of the unexpected. They offer startling presences that are entirely absent from the emptied, lifeless, and monotonous film images. Rather than overcoming the photographic tension between absence and presence, these images seem to welcome yet another layer of "lack." The autochromes represent moving subjects. And yet, they are neither present, nor moving. Any search among the expedition films for the seconds that precede and follow these temporal excisions proves futile. Evidence of moving presence is lacking there, too.

The expedition films generate a similar visual inversion. In their absenting of people, events, and movements (beyond that of the camera/operator), the films frequently recreate the kind of mortal shadows that so many have assigned to the photographic image. Rather than the space of life and activity, the films present little more than an unchanging and unpopulated landscape of phantoms. And while the films would never be tucked in pockets or handled in quite the same way as photographs, they share in the kind of fetishistic rendering of the world that Metz reserves for the photograph and Artaud's experimental cohort defends as a uniquely cinematic quality. Despite its myriad and seemingly endless pans of geographic surfaces, the expedition films distill the world's people and landscapes into an essentialized collection of images: markets, village roads, deserts, craggy shores, rooftop pans. Contrary to Metz's assessment of cinema, these films do not contain

“too many things.” The diversity of the planet dissolves on screen. Although both the photographs and the films retain something of “themselves”—the films move, the photographs do not—they function as something much more complicated.

Photographs made to move. Films brought to a standstill.

In the end, what kind of image of the world do these autochromes and films construct? What kind of sum or totality do they combine to form? The expedition collection not only fails to cohere ontologically, to tidily parse the world into iconic still portraits and event-filled moving images, it also seemingly fails to satisfy Kahn’s and Brunhes’s desires for visible evidence of human and geographic presences. As I describe, certain photographic series function as a kind of proto-cinema—a substitute cinema—bearing the indirect traces of time passing, landscapes changing, and bodies moving, while the repetitive surface pans in the expedition films frame the world’s diverse landscapes as always and familiarly there, a handful of unchanging, recognizable, and near-photographic presences. But taken together, these ontological inversions do not compensate for the absence of photographic presence and cinematic movement. The expedition photographs and films do not exchange their essential, representational features. They do not elide the awkwardness of their mutual absences and recreate the comparatively seamless visions of the domestic collection. Moving subjects are divided by the photographic frame and immobilized by the photographic process. Geographic presences are undermined by the rapidity of swiftly gliding pans, as well as an always-ambiguous sense of space and time. The world’s landscapes may be “there,” but where, exactly, are they? And when? The cinematic behavior of the autochromes and the photographic resonances of the films underscore the considerable gap that emerges between the supposed aims of the project—a comprehensive visual representation of the planet’s people, places, and events—and the project itself. Its visions only ever convey a kind of unfinished, incoherent, or illegible quality.

One possible explanation for this discrepancy emerges in the figure of Henri Bergson. Numerous scholars have unsurprisingly attributed Kahn's appreciation for direct visual experiences to his former tutor, frequent interlocutor, and philosophical mentor. In a letter to Bergson from 1886, Kahn wrote that travel allows man "to progress, to progress always by the means of his reason, to deliberate on the mechanism of the laws of the Universe, to progress always with hope and faith, to vibrate with the infinite."<sup>58</sup> Kahn's letter affirms the most general of connections between Kahn and Bergson's visual philosophies, as does his rhetorical slide between notions of progress and reason to the more spiritually-oriented ideas of hope, faith, and "the infinite." A similar divide frames Bergson's philosophy of perception and recollection. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson posits vision as central to human perception, knowledge, and, in short, all of the processes by which one orders and understands the world. He states, "Here I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are open to them, unperceived when they are closed. All these images act and react upon one another in all their elementary parts according to constant laws which I call laws of nature."<sup>59</sup> One can easily detect traces of Bergsonian thought at work in the foundations of *Les Archives de la Planète*.

In Bergson's metaphysics, objects become "images." The most complex and exceptional of all available images is the human body. The body lies at the center of perception and action. It perceives external images and responds to them. It receives movements and initiates movements in return. Bergson assigns the body-image the very unique capacity to enact dynamic forces, to make choices and act within the world. These choices change external images, change the body's relationship to those

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Beausoleil, "Portrait en creux," *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988): 17.

images, and change relationships between images. This relationship between the body and the external images that it encounters signifies something over and above the division between action/inaction, active influence/inactive influence, or autonomy/dependence. In these moments of perception, the body experiences what Bergson terms “affection.” The body perceives sensations or “affective states” that emerge from within the body of the perceiver. In other words, the body sees images and then feels sensations. Bergson explains, “Just as external objects are perceived by me where they are, in themselves and not in me, so my affective states are experienced where they occur, that is, at a given point in my body [...] Affection is, then, that part or aspect of the inside of the body which we mix with the image of external bodies; it is first of all what we must subtract from perception to get the image in its purity.”<sup>60</sup> To this mingling of sight and sensation, of things external and internal to the body, Bergson adds yet another layer of perception: what he refers to as “spirit.” Just as our perception of the world mingles with our particular sensations born of that world, our perception mingles with our memories. Recollection is the spiritual counterpart to the materiality of sight and sensation. Present perceptions are joined with past memories, just as past memories gain new contours and depth in their associations with a present visual encounter. Recollection also guarantees a certain temporal extension. One does not perceive an object in the world and respond with recollections from the past at the same, simultaneous instant. Like the unfolding of affective states, this process takes time.

For Bergson, “pure” perception operates as the theoretical counterpoint to the matter-spirit bind of human perception. Objective perception would be a purely visual encounter, unfettered by recollection, which necessarily originates somewhere entirely outside of or beyond the human body. From Bergson’s perspective, this kind of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 57-58.



perceptual process would be lacking, in spirit perhaps most of all. He writes, “To live only in the present, to respond to a stimulus by the immediate reaction which prolongs it, is the mark of lower animals.”<sup>61</sup> One might also argue that this form of perception is the mark of visual machines. Bergson’s theory poses considerable challenges to *Les Archives de la Planète*. In his use of the term “image,” Bergson implies that objects, memories, and even bodies exist as distinct visual units, each one necessarily separated from the other in space. For example, it would be reasonable for me to assume that I am separate from a rock that exists outside of me. However, Bergson insists that one makes these kinds of spatial separations arbitrarily, for the sake of sheer comprehensibility. They do not reveal true knowledge about the world in which humans, and human perception, dwell. For Bergson, I am tied to the rock through movements made in unbroken time. My movements toward it, away from it, or with it. The human body exists in “pure duration, of which the flow is continuous and in which we pass insensibly from one state to another: a continuity which is really lived, but artificially decomposed for the greater convenience of customary knowledge.”<sup>62</sup> Bergson’s metaphysics requires a rethinking of the world as temporal extension, rather than spatial discontinuity. Objects are not separated from the perceiving body or each other; moments and memories are not distinctive “images.” Each of these perceptual elements is joined, one to the other, in a continuous, temporal flow. While human perception grasps the continuity of time, it must battle against the machinations of the mind or “customary knowledge.” Any attempt to render the world visibly comprehensible, to quite literally divide its temporal duration into photographic slices contradicts Bergson’s understanding of true knowledge.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 186.

One can certainly see the world as separate, photographic images. It is easy. And useful. The photographic image helps organize the world and our experience of its contents. But the world as it really is—wherein we act—continues to flow, uselessly and undisrupted, elsewhere. Film offers little relief from this difficult bind. While Bergson implicitly disavows photographic representations of human perception, he explicitly rejects the foundations of cinematic representation. He argues, “It is impossible to construct, a priori, movement with immobilities, a thing no man ever doubted.”<sup>63</sup> At the time of *Memory and Matter*’s publication in 1896, Bergson could have been unaware of the very real machines he so accurately describes and dismisses. However, Bergson does not deny the existence or visual possibilities of cinema for long. In *Creative Evolution*, he uses cinema as a metaphor for the spatializing work of the mind. The camera makes static frames of real movement. In its projection, it offers only an illusion. Static frames made to move. Cinema simply cannot create, or re-create movement. Bergson writes, “Such is the contrivance of the *cinématographe*. And such is also that of our knowledge. Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially.”<sup>64</sup> Bergson offers few suggestions as to how one can resist his/her own mental energies, confound artifice, and remain in the true realm of human perception. “Arbitrarily” extracting photographs or film footage from the world seems to be a step in the wrong direction, a step toward the lowest, spiritually bereft forms of perception.

Bergson’s metaphysics resonates with *Les Archives de la Planète* in a number of ways. Bergson provides a critical lens through which one can begin to understand the spatial and temporal corollaries of photography and film. He anticipates the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>64</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911): 332.

fissures that erupt between the realm of true, human perception—the realm upon which the operators direct their photographic and cinematic lenses—and the actual photographs and films that they produce. No matter the geographic subject, the totality of the archive's photographs and films do not recreate the images and affective states of human perception, nor do they capture the uninterrupted continuity of time. A gap emerges between reality and representation, the time and space of photographic and cinematic recording and the time and space of the present, passing moment. Despite Kahn's faith in visual technologies and his dream of a visual duplicate of the planet's surfaces and surface events, his photo-film archive could only ever produce something other than the planet itself. Unaffected fragments. One might likewise read Bergson and the archives together, as equal reflections of a distinct turn-of-the-century concern with space and time, motion and movement, visibility and the many shifts in perception that were brought with new technologies and modes of travel.

Still, if one resists casting Kahn and Brunhes as naïvely invested in visual reproduction or reified processes of classification, always and forever producing spatial discontinuity and an inadequate duplicate of the planet, a more interesting reading of the expedition collection comes into view. For Bergson, the world appeared a continuous stretch of unrepresentable time. For Kahn and Brunhes, the world needed to be preserved, in all of its continuity and duration. Everything was moving and changing so quickly. Against Bergson's dismissals of visual representation, the expedition collection operates as a study in human perception. Though separated by form and content, the expedition photographs and films share in the representation of duration. The photographic series and endless panning shots reflect an effort to temporalize space, to overcome the unaffected fragments of spatialized, represented, and recorded time. In further adherence to Bergsonian theories of perception, a perceiving human subject dwells at the center of the

expedition collection. The presence of a body behind the camera (walking, turning the apparatus, standing in place) marks the exploration of interiors, the 360-degree panorama of Angkor Wat, and the autochromes of sunrises/sunsets, to name only a few examples. Rather than capturing coherent bodies, objects, and landscapes, the expedition collection transmits experiences of those forms, over time. It records the act of seeing and the practice of ethnography underway. While it may not communicate the affective states or spirit of true human perception, the expedition collection resembles the collisions between body and machine, or vision and sensation, articulated and generated by members of the European avant-garde, including Jean Epstein and Germaine Dulac.

Bergson only gets us so far. Whether one considers his theory of perception a guiding influence, historical symptom, or critical lens, he fails to wholly address the gap that emerges between the domestic and expedition collections. The former balances the empty icons of the Parisian landscape and the abstract photographic play of color and form with the human events of European history, with activity and action, with discernible movements in identifiable locations. Though surely incapable of satisfying the lofty aims of visual totality, the domestic collection depicts individuals, places, and historical events of the early twentieth century in a clear and comprehensible way. It organizes the world into photographic and cinematic categories, stillness and movement, architecture and activity, postcards and actualities. Simply put, the domestic collection combines photography and film in a way that makes very basic visual sense. By contrast, the expedition collection joins photographic fragments with empty cinematic frames, motionless and decontextualized events with repetitive and unremarkable pans, the hyper-particular with the over-generalized. It fails to organize itself around individuals or events, specific moments or spaces. It moves between the no-place and no-time of, say, an

African landscape, and the experience of a single individual, on a single day, at a single moment (suffering in prison, chewing a betel nut, or watching from behind the lens). And, perhaps most importantly, the expedition collection seems to call into question the very visual media it takes as its means of expression. What accounts for these deviations in content, form, and meaning? Why are the domestic and expedition collections so different? While both are guided by an overarching search for visible evidence, the content of these archival halves reflect a search for different kinds of visible evidence, different methods of capturing and presenting this visible evidence, different projects altogether.

In a historical summary of Brunhes's methodology, Marie Bonhomme and Mariel Jean-Brunhes Delamarre outline the written instructions that were given to expedition operators, including a list of subjects that were deemed worthy of the visual archive. Brunhes assigned each subject to either the "photo" or "cinéma" category. The list was intended to guide operators and to establish some kind of correspondence between the photographs and films. At the same time, the operators had tremendous creative autonomy during their expeditions and the list was meant as a kind of opening up and an initial outline, rather than a set of firm limitations:

#### **Photo**

Monuments  
Palais  
Monuments religieux ou équivalents  
Cimetières  
Types d'hommes  
Hommes célèbres  
Types de maisons  
Décoration intérieure et extérieure  
Types d'ameublements  
Vêtements et uniformes divers  
(civils et militaires)  
Bijoux  
Armes, etc...  
Ustensiles de cuisine, etc.

#### **Cinéma**

Scènes de la vie  
Cérémonies religieuses  
Prière individuelle et collective  
Processions  
Enterrements  
Baptême ou équivalent  
Mariages—fiançailles—danses et cérémonies diverses  
Entrée et sortie des monuments  
Types d'hommes  
Hommes célèbres  
Scènes de la vie militaire  
Scènes caractéristiques du pays—étudiants—bergers

Métiers manuels, etc.  
Industries locales  
Aspect général des agglomérations  
humaines  
Champs—Cultures—Enclos, etc.

Vêtements et uniformes divers  
(civils et militaires)  
Construction de maisons  
Intérieurs  
Animaux domestiques  
Routes—Rues—Jardins—Cours,  
etc.  
Instruments de labour, etc.  
Métiers manuels  
Moyens de locomotion et de  
transport  
Voitures—Bateaux—Attelages  
Marchés  
Aliments (Manière de les  
préparer—  
Boissons locales)  
Scènes de repas (façon de  
manger)  
Industries locales  
Aspect général des  
agglomérations humaines  
Champs—Cultures—Enclos, etc.  
Routes—Rues—Jardins—Cours,  
etc.<sup>65</sup>

In the end, Brunhes's list bears little resemblance to the actual expedition collection. The photographic subjects exceed Brunhes's boundaries, while the films fall short of being their perfect, moving counterpoint, full of ceremonies, domestic animals, and famous people. But the list itself invites just this kind of disobedience and experimentation. It forms a kind of overwhelming catchall, with "Armes, etc..." leading the way in suggestive vagueness. Nearly anything becomes visually admissible and Brunhes could have easily dispatched a much shorter directive: if you see it, record it.

Despite vehement claims to the contrary, something of the dada-esque or experimental penetrates this method of organizing the earth's surface.<sup>66</sup> Brunhes's list

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Bonhomme and Brunhes Delamarre, "La méthode des missions des *Archives de la Planète*," *Jean Brunhes: Autour du Monde*, 202-203.

makes the world appear infinitely divisible, categorizable, impossible. The chains of nouns could continue unbroken, trailing off into infinity. This list underscores the spaces within and between each selection. What other terms could join students, shepherds, and uniforms? Which, of all possible objects, has been omitted? What new meanings or sense do these conceptual gatherings produce? No less evidence of a certain avant-garde sensibility, Brunhes's list positions the very visual technologies he intends to put in the service of human geography beneath the lens of geographic inquiry. Photography and cinema become objects of study, rather than simply the means by which to render objects study-able. Brunhes's list reveals a simultaneous thinking-through of visual ontology, of the images that "belong" to photography and film, and of the territory that these two machines potentially share. In the context of "elsewhere," the form and function of photography and film appear to unravel. Photography and cinema become as strange and unfamiliar, as challenging to tradition, perception, and interpretation, as the world's non-European geographies.

In *Les Archives de la Planète*, the visual divide between here and elsewhere extends beyond geographic differences. In other words, the collections do not look different simply because the places they aim to represent differ (visually, culturally, etc.). Whereas the domestic collection organizes itself around recognizable individuals and events, the expedition collection takes every moment, every person, every landscape—absolutely everything—as a possible cinematic or photographic subject. It does not cohere around the quaint or the newsworthy, the narrative or narratable event. The energies of the expedition cameras are boundless and unimpeded, guided only by their search for the unfamiliar, extended over time. When

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<sup>66</sup> In her essay, "*Les Archives de la Planète* d'Albert Kahn (1908-1931): Archives ou contre-archives de l'histoire," Amad also attempts to resituate the archives within an avant-garde context. In *Les Archives de la Planète*, she sees something of the anarchy and the atemporality that characterized the avant-garde archives of the everyday, including the British Mass Observation movement and Walter Benjamin's *Arcades* project. See *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* 74 (2001): 19-31.

compared with the domestic images, the expedition collection reads as decidedly out of control, wandering, and imprecise. Yet, in this overwhelming and often inscrutable surplus, one uncovers the essential features of early visual ethnography. The archive's division between domestic and expedition, sense and non-sense, visual conventions and exceptions, demarcates a division between the actuality and early ethnographic genres. *Les Archives de la Planète* belongs to the kind of historical moment that James Clifford describes as richly intertextual, multivocal, fluid, and impure, a moment in which the boundaries between science, literature, and art were blurred, as was the very distinction between the technologically/ideologically empowered ethnographer self and the disempowered ethnographed Other.<sup>67</sup> *Les Archives de la Planète* bears some of the very same signs of cultural disorientation and mixture that typify the deliberately impure and self-reflexive works that inform Clifford's understanding of twentieth-century visual culture. Indeed, the archive constitutes its own complex human geography. Innumerable pathways through history and human thought mark its surface. Some of these pathways belong to Kahn and Brunhes, some to individual operators, and some to influences and ideas that entered despite being uninvited. But these pathways were carved upon a fundamentally insecure foundation. In joining photography and cinema with the ethnographic search for visible difference, early visual ethnographies like *Les Archives de la Planète* were always and already destabilized and decentered, always and already revealing these illegible visions on-screen, always and already calling ethnographic tradition into question. *Les Archives de la Planète* represents the unfamiliar with the unfamiliar, the infinite horizon of visible difference with the infinite possibilities of visual reproduction. Which of all possible instants should be photographed? Which of all possible segments of time

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<sup>67</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988): 13.



should be filmed? Where is the boundary between similarity and difference? Where is the boundary between photography and film? In *Les Archives de la Planète*, infinite signs of difference vibrate with infinite ways of seeing.

*Returning to the Museum: Ethnographic Futures in Boulogne-Billancourt*

Today, *Les Archives de la Planète* contains roughly 72,000 autochromes and 183,000 meters of film.<sup>68</sup> The enclosed gardens at Boulogne-Billancourt also house the conservation and restoration facilities for the archives. The meticulous efforts to preserve what once was and to protect the projects of Albert Kahn against the effects of time extend to the archives themselves, the buildings which house them, and even the rotating exhibitions which are assembled at a small museum on the property. The bottom floor of the conservation department, where the autochromes and films are stored, consists of a large open room, with windows that open out onto the gardens and enclosed wooden bookcases that line the walls from floor to ceiling. Each bookshelf contains a neat row of rectangular wooden boxes. Each box has a small, weathered label, with the name of a country handwritten in careful, calligraphic lettering: *Afrique, Chine, Japon*. These boxes contain the unique, irreproducible, glass autochrome plates. When one enters the conservation department from the gardens, the temporal suspension and the fantastic heterotopian space seamlessly continue. One imagines Brunhes walking in at any moment to collect his slides.

The meticulous preservation of the gardens and the archives equally preserves the memory of Kahn, Brunhes, and a mythology of idealism and innovation. It also erects an intellectual brick wall. During my first day at the archive, a museum curator

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Pasqua, "Le cinéma a cent ans," *Albert Kahn, 1860-1940*, 11. Though autochrome photography and 35-millimeter films constitute the primary media support for *Les Archives de la Planète*, the archives also include around 4,000 stereoscopic images, a small amount of Dorian-Keller process color film footage, and several written bulletins, detailing current events. One should also note that Kahn purchased some of his films from external sources, including Gaumont.

asked me what country I was researching. Over the course of the next few weeks, I began to understand why this question made sense. Implicit in the curator's inquiry, as well as the way in which the property and its artifacts are maintained, is an acceptance of *Les Archives de la Planète* as a transparent and unproblematic historical tool, as a totalizing "visual Esperanto." The museum encourages an easy slide between vision, visual representation, and knowledge. Visitors are invited to view the archives and learn about a country, a people, or a moment. And, to be sure, historians frequently search the archives for clues about Paris during World War I or what Mongolian prisoners wore in the 1920s. The museum simply does not perceive its visual collection as a potential object of criticism and study, an object of considerable complexity, strangeness, defiance, and surprising aestheticism. This approach to the archival materials also shapes the museum exhibitions. As Sam Rohdie points out, "The exhibits tend to be tautological. They indicate, for example, that this is Japan and in Japan there are Japanese and the Japanese have Japanese temples and live in Japanese houses."<sup>69</sup> During my visit to the museum, the exhibition was entitled "Couleurs du Maghreb" and included a selection of autochromes from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. During the winter of 2008, an exhibit at the *Hôtel de Ville* also featured a number of Kahn autochromes of the city. It was entitled "Paris en couleurs." The pattern is not difficult to detect.

In the effort to preserve Kahn's projects and the historical moment in which he lived, as well as to honor his and Brunhes's prescient understanding of visual technologies and new archival possibilities, the very foundations of the Kahn project, including human geography, temporal extension, and intertextuality, have been ironically banished from the premises. The Kahn gardens are one of the few sites in the entire city where one could not easily discover the trace of present, human activity

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<sup>69</sup> Rohdie, "Geography, Photography, The Cinema," (September 1998).

on its surface. If he were to visit the site today, Brunhes would have to train his camera outside, beyond the gates, toward the peripheral highway to get a glimpse of the kinds of geographies that interested him. Behind the gates, human traces are discouraged, covered up, and ignored. Considered alongside these practices of preservation, the Kahn exhibitions are guided by what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett terms the “ethnographic fragment” and a “poetics of detachment.” She writes:

Like the ruin, the ethnographic fragment is informed by a poetics of detachment. Detachment refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments but also to the detached attitude that makes that fragmentation and its appreciation possible [...] Ruins inspired the feelings of melancholy and wonder associated with the sublime. They stimulated the viewer to imagine the building in its former pristine state. They offered the pleasure of longing for the irretrievable object of one's fantasy.<sup>70</sup>

The Kahn museum itself operates as a kind of ruin, a geographic fragment separated from the complex history of French imperialism, visual ethnography, and human geography, as well as the city of Paris itself and contemporary debates regarding the politics and possibilities of ethnographic practice. The actual contents of the museum exhibitions—the autochromes and films put on display—are detached from these histories and discourses, as well as from the cultures and contexts out of which they were produced. One image of a Japanese house, taken more than a century ago, stands in synecdochal relationship to Japan, Japanese houses, etc. Ironically, the museum enacts the very kind of ethnographic salvage that the archive, in the era of its production, never actually did. The archive saves Kahn, Brunhes, and the images

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<sup>70</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 18-19.

that the operators produced. Bodies are detached, fixed, and hermetically sealed. They are carefully protected against the intrusions of history and future time.

I began and conclude this chapter with an ethnographic description of a multi-layered ethnographic site. My reading is inflected by my distance from the culture of the Kahn archive and the geography of Paris, as well as my proximity to the history of ethnography and early visual practices. I see some things and overlook others. My reading may misinterpret institutional rituals. But there is nothing pure in Boulogne-Billancourt and the efforts to preserve, protect, and salvage seem misplaced. The archive contains a patchwork of visual documents. They bear the influence of multiple operators, philosophies, voices, and histories. What would it mean for the archive to acknowledge this impurity and intertextuality, and to actually open out onto a more progressive ethnographic practice and mode of ethnographic exhibition? What would it mean for the museum to “vibrate with the infinite” and release the images from their taxidermic enclosures? What would it mean to invite the planet *into* the archive, to offer up its images for “reassemblages,” refashionings, subversions, and inter-medial encounters?<sup>71</sup> The most stunning aspect of the Kahn project is that it was developed in the early twentieth century as a body of materials that could mean something at a later time, in some future moment. It was conceived as an archive. The technology exists whereby the ruin could become part of a new whole, a thick ethnography, a landscape that doesn’t need to be salvaged, for it continues to grow and change. The autochromes could come into contact with the films, the domestic could encounter the expedition, and history could communicate with the visual. The archive could become part of a virtual planet.

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<sup>71</sup> I take this term from Trinh T. Minh-ha’s film *Reassemblage* (1982). See also Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “Esthetics of Resistance,” *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994): 292-337.

OTHER TIMES AND SPACES:  
HOW CINEMA UNMAKES ETHNOGRAPHY'S OBJECT

The ethnographic impulse inflects many modes of artistic, scientific, and administrative discourse. The desire to discover, observe, study, measure, display, and describe the unfamiliar and the far away shapes eighteenth-century travel writing, nineteenth-century colonial expositions, and twentieth-century field studies of Dogon cosmology.<sup>1</sup> What would eventually become the academic discipline of anthropology, recognized in the early twentieth century by American, Anglo, and French Universities as a distinct field of study, began with the work of explorers, missionaries, colonial officials, artists, showmen, tourists, and armchair academics. Some of these early practitioners were no doubt moved by the tide of popular culture and the fantastic possibilities of dark continents and tropical islands. Some were committed to the aims of religion, nationalism, or a burgeoning social science. Some simply hoped to profit from a public appetite for wild things. No matter the underlying motivations or methodologies, whether the product of a questionable “pre-disciplinary” moment or months of cultural immersion and participant observation, all ethnographic practices share in the same fundamental point of departure: taxonomic difference. Ethnography presupposes that essential differences separate nations, cultures, villages, and/or bodies. These differences can be identified and classified. “Pre-disciplinary” ethnographic practices often communicated this presupposition in less-than-subtle fashion. Fences divided empire from colony, European citizen from savage spectacle. Cages housed orangutans and Congolese natives in the Bronx Zoo. The Angkor Wat temple came to Paris, lest there be any confusion about where Cambodians belonged.<sup>2</sup> Though such procedures

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Griaule conducted the study to which I refer here. See *Masques Dogons* (Paris: Institut d’Ethnologie, 1938) and *Dieu d’eau, entretiens avec Ogotemméli* (Paris: Fayard, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> For details of Ota Benga’s capture and captivity at the Bronx Zoo, see Phillips Verner Bradford and Harvey Blume, *Ota Benga: Pygmy in the Zoo* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992). The Angkor Wat temple was reconstructed for the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* in 1931. See Catherine Hodeir,

were soon abandoned, shuffled into the dusty archives of natural history museums, the presupposition of taxonomic difference sustained anthropology's most basic disciplinary division and underpinned a host of less-institutionalized ethnographic practices for centuries. It constituted ethnographic objects of study, identified those fit to conduct such study, and justified the enormous gap between the two.

In the 1960s, amid the lingering wake of World War II and the rise of independence movements across Africa and Asia, critical reconsiderations of language, representation, and the boundaries of the social sciences—from scholars both outside of and within the discipline of anthropology—began to collide with those centuries' worth of colonial, popular, and academic ethnography. This encounter catalyzed the rigorous interrogation of ethnographic practice, the categories of difference it presumed to be true, and the neat binaries frequently marshaled to communicate these presumptions and to organize the outcomes of ethnographic study. Jacques Derrida's seminal reading of Claude Lévi-Strauss signaled what would become many radical shifts in the epistemological aims of reading and interpreting ethnographic texts. Rather than sifting through ethnographic writing in search of new geographic contours, Derrida redirects readers' attention to the act of writing itself and disrupts the previously unfettered transmission of ethnographic description. He argues that, "the person writing is inscribed in a determined textual system. Even if there is never a pure signified, there are different relationships as to that which, from the signifier, *is presented* as the irreducible stratum of the signified."<sup>3</sup> For Derrida, the responsibilities of the reader include excavating and articulating the signifying structures that both inform the written

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1931, *L'exposition coloniale* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1991) and Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Representation and Architecture at the 1931 International Colonial Exposition in Paris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000). Interestingly enough, Antonin Artaud saw Balinese theatre for the first time at the reconstructed temple.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976): 160.

content and are obscured by it, for the written text is always engaged in the project of “effacing itself in the face of the signified content which it transports and in general teaches.”

For his part, Derrida foregrounds the division Lévi-Strauss draws between oral and written communication. In making this distinction, Lévi-Strauss participates in an extensive “textual system” of Western thought that privileges speech over writing. Lévi-Strauss understands speech as not only a superior form of communication, but as the first and more natural form of expression. Speech unfolds between present, thinking bodies. It transmits centuries’ old myths directly. Writing arrives in the absence of interlocutors, a corrupt re-presentation of thought. Speech allows for a free and immediate transfer of information. Writing facilitates “the enslavement of other human beings.”<sup>4</sup> For Lévi-Strauss, the Nambikwara exist before and outside of this secondary form of communication. They lack writing, as well as the violence and power that writing enacts. Though couched as a kind of progressive anti-ethnocentrism, the system within which Lévi-Strauss writes and within which he positions himself with regard to the Nambikwara, adheres to an all-too-familiar rhetorical pattern. Derrida writes, “One discovers here a gesture inherited from the eighteenth century, from a certain eighteenth century at any rate, for even in that century a certain sporadic suspicion of such an exercise had already commenced. Non-European peoples were not only studied as an index to a hidden good Nature, as a native soil recovered, of a ‘zero degree’ with reference to which one could outline the structure, growth, and above all the degradation of our society and culture.”<sup>5</sup> Like cages at the zoo or fences at the colonial exposition, Lévi-Strauss flattens the diversity of a people into neat categories of difference: good and bad, purity and corruption,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

innocence and guilt, speech and writing, the ethnographic subject and the ethnographer.

Such distinctions emerge over and again in *Tristes Tropiques*, as does the evidence of their inadequacies. “A Writing Lesson” explicitly demonstrates that the Nambikwara write. They map and organize. They classify objects and each other. They bring “classificatory difference into play.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, their elaborate tradition of assigning and obliterating the proper name positions them, like Lévi-Strauss, within a complex textual system that they are forever in the process of effacing. The boundaries Lévi-Strauss erects simply cannot hold:

If the “Lesson” is to be believed, the Nambikwara did not know violence before writing; nor hierarchization, since that is quickly assimilated into exploitation. Round about the “Lesson,” it suffices to open *Tristes Tropiques* and the thesis at any page to find striking evidence to the contrary. We are dealing here not only with a strongly hierarchized society, but with a society where relationships are marked with a spectacular violence. As spectacular as the innocent and tender frolics evoked at the beginning of the “Lesson,” and that we were thus justified in considering as the calculated premises of a loaded argument.<sup>7</sup>

In his reading of *Tristes Tropiques*, Derrida destabilizes the divide between Lévi-Strauss and the Nambikwara, between ethnographer and ethnographic subject. He likewise turns Lévi-Strauss’s supposed anti-ethnocentrism on its head. He argues that, “the difference between peoples with and peoples without writing is accepted, but writing as the criterion of historicity or cultural value is not taken into account;

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 135



ethnocentrism will apparently be avoided at the very moment when it will have already profoundly operated, silently imposing its standard concepts of speech and writing.”<sup>8</sup> The Nambikwara are not a people without writing, but a written people. Despite his privileging of speech and the Nambikwara above writing and Western imperialism, Lévi-Strauss is always already inscribed within a system that values writing above speech. *Tristes Tropiques* silences the speech of the Nambikwara and recasts this production of silence as natural fact.

Derrida’s analysis of written practice in general and ethnographic writing in particular invited (and continues to invite) a broad shift in the reception of and critical engagement with ethnographic texts: from written surface to effaced substratum, from pure signified to signifying relationships. In turn, a rich body of scholarship began to articulate the categories of difference that constitute ethnographic practice and to examine the many ways in which these underlying structures inflect ethnographic discourse well before any ethnographer arrives in the field. These categories of ethnographic difference and subsequent critique include (1) spatial distance and (2) temporal disjunction. Taken together, this body of post-structural criticism locates the many ways in which ethnocentric divisions in space and time silently impose themselves upon the seemingly banal surface descriptions of dietary habits, daily routines, and ceremonial rituals. Before these critical reconsiderations began to circulate, ethnographic writing subtly effaced the complex conditions of spatial proximity and temporal simultaneity that make ethnographic study possible. It depicted its subjects as the inhabitants of radically different geographies and histories. To return to the work of Lévi-Strauss, the reductive division he proposes between speech and writing certainly distinguishes two different modes of communication; however, it likewise inserts a tremendous spatial and temporal chasm between

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 121.

ethnographer and ethnographic subject. Speech and writing are cultural demarcations. Writing belongs to the modern, industrialized West; speech is the province of an ancient and innocent elsewhere. Though Derrida never makes explicit the link between speech/writing and these broader categories of difference, the language he ascribes to Lévi-Strauss's writing process concretely acknowledges the spatial aspects of this division, if not the temporal ones. At turns, Derrida accuses Lévi-Strauss of positioning writing "outside," "beyond," and "below" speech, of separating "writing from speech with an ax."<sup>9</sup> More than a conceptual distinction, the division between speech and writing is spatial, physical. It is also unmistakably violent.

The impact of this historical and critical turn cannot be underestimated. For the discipline of anthropology and the broad field of ethnographic activity, it ushered in an era of experimentation and auto-ethnography. It called for a critical rethinking of ethnographic methodologies, as well as the kinds and quality of knowledge one could hope to cull from travel, observation, fieldwork, and writing. Despite these far-reaching upheavals and renovations, ethnographic cinema largely escaped the consideration of these critical analyses.

There are several possible explanations for such an omission. The first, and perhaps most obvious, acknowledges the academic genealogy and linguistic concerns of the post-structural project. It developed out of and in response to the rigid language systems proposed by semiotics and the adaptation of those systems by structural anthropologists. Post-structuralism purposefully engages the *language* of ethnographic practice, the transition from fieldwork/oral practice to publication/written practice. Still, how does one explain the omission of cinema from the much more diverse terrain of criticism that emerges in the 1960s and develops well beyond this historical moment? One might attribute this to writing's privileged and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 120-121.

long established status as a mode of ethnographic practice. When Derrida addressed Lévi-Strauss, written ethnography had existed for centuries, while cinema had existed for roughly seven decades. Moreover, both traditional and visual anthropologists favored ethnographic writing over ethnographic film. This preference stands well after post-structuralism obliterates the foundations of written practice. Ethnographic cinema was neither as prolific a part of popular culture, nor as well integrated a part of official anthropological institutions as its written counterparts. It could only ever be a supplement to written practice, as Karl Heider explains (the full suggestive import of which, I do not think, he ever intended; I discuss the implications of this term at length in a few concluding comments).<sup>10</sup> Critics perhaps either shared or passively inherited these preferences and ambivalences, overlooking the visual supplement to the written supplement that was projected in theaters and museums across the globe.

Although early ethnographic cinema was never taken all that seriously, and certainly never engaged with the kind of rigorous scrutiny extended to the work of Franz Boas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, and E. B. Tyler, it was (and continues to be) frequently swept away with vague references to the very categories of difference that guide critical reevaluations of written ethnography. An easy slide from ethnographer/ethnographic subject to filmmaker/film subject is not an uncommon rhetorical phenomenon in studies of non-fiction and ethnographic film. I linger at length upon several examples of this gesture in the introduction to this dissertation. In this conflation of forms, ethnographic cinema becomes an inferior, less interesting, and potentially less threatening repetition of written practice, rather than a supplement that fills a void, marks an emptiness, or contributes something altogether different to written

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<sup>10</sup> See Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976): 96. In the introduction to this dissertation, I discuss Heider's principles of visual ethnography at length.

ethnography. By contrast, post-war ethnographic filmmakers like David MacDougall and Jean Rouch understand their film practice as contributing something distinct, as opening up a more informal space for dialogue, reflexivity, and experimentation. As I note in the introduction to this dissertation, David MacDougall concludes, “Films can never replace the written word in anthropology, but anthropologists are made conscious by their field experience of the limitations which words impose upon their discipline. We are beginning to understand how film can fill some of the blind spots.”<sup>11</sup> What is most remarkable about the consolidation of visual anthropology in the United States and Europe after World War II, exemplified by MacDougall’s remarks about the proper function of ethnographic cinema, is the way in which the visual emerges out of the perceived failures and limitations of language. Post-war ethnographic cinema offers a corrective to written ethnography, rather than a critical engagement with and rethinking of the forms of ethnographic cinema that precede it.

The occlusion of early ethnographic cinema from this complex history of production, critique, collapse, and reconstitution creates yet another set of “blind spots.” What and how does early ethnographic cinema communicate? In what ways do written and visual ethnographic practice overlap and deviate? What would a post-structural encounter, or even a close-analysis of formal devices and patterns, reveal about early ethnographic cinema? What kinds of pathways exist between the first three decades of ethnographic cinema and the post-war products of visual anthropology? This chapter offers a preliminary response to these questions that nevertheless endeavors to move beyond the kinds of cursory comparisons that distinguish word from image, writing from cinema.

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<sup>11</sup> David MacDougall, “Ethnographic Film: Failure and Promise,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 424.

To be sure, all films fail to emulate written forms. Writing and cinema communicate time and space in fundamentally different ways. They are different forms of representation, different acts of translation. Cinema guarantees visual presence and simultaneity in a way that is decidedly absent and/or effaced from written practice. As Bill Nichols so clearly articulates, the indexical sign of cinema, unlike the iconic or arbitrary sign, “enjoys an existential bond between itself and that to which it refers. In some manner and to some degree its appearance is determined via specific correspondences with its referent.”<sup>12</sup> And yet, in their search for other bodies and landscapes, for the unfamiliar and the faraway, writing and cinema unite beneath the umbrella of ethnographic practice, joined in the presupposition of visible, taxonomic difference. This chapter interrogates this point of contact, examining the very particular ways in which cinema participates in the ethnographic project during the first few decades of the twentieth century, communicating difference and distance. Here, I focus on two recurrent visual events or “sites” that exemplify the spatial and temporal complexities of early ethnographic cinema and emerge with startling frequency throughout the 1910s and 1920s: (1) the hunt and (2) dance. Both the hunt and dance display what Randy Martin terms, “a relation of forces joined in tension.”<sup>13</sup> They are sites of domination and resistance, desire and revulsion, visual display and concealment. They are also sites of ritual activity. As I discuss in Chapter One, a ritual practice is both real and representational. In early ethnographic cinema, the hunt and dance index a discrete moment of hunting or dancing, while simultaneously signifying forms of social and cultural meaning that exceed the singularity and specificity of the indexed instant. The hunt and dance are the sites around which these films circulate, upon which they depend. They are the visual events that define the

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<sup>12</sup> Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981): 239.

<sup>13</sup> Randy Martin, “Dance Ethnography and the Limits of Representation,” *Social Text* 33 (1992): 104.

ethnographic expedition and entice spectators into the theater. And yet, they are sites of spatial, temporal, and epistemic ambiguity. In this chapter, I argue that early ethnographic cinema challenges the categories of spatial and temporal distance that undergird ethnographic writing and its post-war upheaval. Rather than clear divisions of past and present time, I locate multiple “times” that unfold within and across these visual sites, colliding with and contradicting the time-contingent medium of cinema itself. These particular sites demonstrate pre-historic and pre-modern time, but they also puncture otherwise unremarkable visual description with spatial uncertainty and temporal instability, haptic surfaces and incomprehensible events.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, I examine the hermetic and often idiosyncratic “operator” archives that were conceived and funded by wealthy entrepreneurs. Though the economic and philosophical excesses of this production model could not be sustained, these early films nevertheless provide a kind of roadmap, introducing the theoretical, visual, and narrative knots which surface over and again in the first few decades of ethnographic cinema. In this chapter, I shift to what one might term a more “conventional” or “institutional” sampling of ethnographic film production: the expedition film. Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, ethnographers and explorers made cinematic records of their expeditions. These films were largely funded by anthropological institutions and government agencies; they were made by trained filmmakers, adventurers, government officials, and anthropologists; and they were screened in museums, popular cinemas, and, sometimes, not at all. Hundreds of expedition films were made during this particular historical window. They integrate complex editing patterns and cinematographic techniques. Intertitles frequently describe, explain, and narrate the visual contents. Rather than popular narrative structures (e.g. the struggles of a family, the formation of a couple, etc.), movements in space and across time organize

the expedition film. It is an ideal form of ethnographic cinema to consider alongside the spatial and temporal schemas of post-structural critique, not only because space and time are so central to the genre, but also because the expedition film is *actually* an ethnographic genre. These films are not idiosyncratic exceptions, but well-established models of early ethnographic filmmaking. The visual conventions of the expedition film—namely, scenes of hunting and dancing—are preceded by what I term the “hunt film” and the “dance film” in the 1910s. As one might imagine, these films are condensed representations of the events that will eventually constitute the expedition film. I consider examples of each of these precursors alongside my analysis of the hunt and dance in expedition filmmaking.

I begin this inquiry with a sketch of the central claims made against written ethnographic practice. This outline will give shape and specificity to the spatial and temporal considerations that I briefly mention in this introduction. It will also provide a necessary context within which one can begin to understand the very particular contributions of early ethnographic cinema. I approach this rich and copious body of work through the scholarship of Edward Said and Johannes Fabian. Though perhaps an unlikely alliance—Said is a literary and cultural theorist whose work leaves little room for the recuperation of anthropology (much less the direct participation in the discipline), while Fabian is a professor of cultural anthropology who has conducted fieldwork in Zaire—both scholars understand ethnographic writing as a process that produces the very differences it claims to observe as natural phenomena.

### *Writing Difference: Theatrical Space and Schizogenic Time*

In his canonical work of postcolonial theory, *Orientalism*, Edward Said never mentions the word “ethnography” and only ever names in passing the principle contributors to the disciplines of American and European anthropology. While the

neglect of certain terms speaks to the specific aims of his project, Said draws textual support from centuries of poetry and prose, military documents and field studies. He detects the Orientalist voice across a wide array of generic, stylistic, and historical contexts. Mirroring my own understanding of ethnography as a broad term encompassing a range of practices and stylistic possibilities, Said expands Orientalism well beyond the boundaries of what was once a respected academic discipline, beyond the work of those writers and thinkers who would have willingly described themselves as Orientalists. He argues that all fields of study are made and that they are “rarely as simply defined as even its most committed partisans—usually scholars, professors, experts, and the like—claim it is.”<sup>14</sup> Orientalism rests upon centuries of discovery, trade, war and writing; it influences popular culture and everyday discourse. More than a fixed discipline and targeted set of practices, Said defines Orientalism as a “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived.”<sup>15</sup> Understood in such a way, ethnography and Orientalism become nearly interchangeable terms. The former encompasses and includes the latter. The latter refers to historically specific, but no less ethnographic routes of exchange. Both presuppose, construct, and naturalize categories of difference.

For Said, Orientalism organizes space. It draws a line between the Occident and the Orient, the familiar “here” and the unfamiliar “over there.” This dividing line binds categories of qualitative difference and spatial distance together. In other words, the Occident and the Orient signify vastly different kinds of things (people, rituals, myths, etc.) that belong to vastly different geographic locations. But qualitative

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994): 50.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



difference and spatial distance impose themselves upon the Orientalist project in what one might call, following Derrida, more silent ways. This Occident-Orient division equally marks a spatial separation between the Orientalist and the Orient, between the voice that speaks or writes and that which is spoken or written. Said argues that, without exception, the Orientalist positions him/herself beyond, away, and apart from the Orient, in the Occidental outside. Indeed, “what [the Orientalist] says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact.”<sup>16</sup> These distinctions in space and kind are not neutral tools of classification, empirically valuable spatial designations, or guarantees of objectivity (no matter the Orientalist’s frequent claims to the contrary). As Said understands them, they belie far more interesting and ideologically-inflected relationships between knowledge and geography, power and place. He writes, “It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries.”<sup>17</sup> The Occident speaks, writes, studies, and learns. The Orient is spoken, written, studied, and learned. Active and inert, familiar and strange, the proximate and the faraway. Through these divisions, Said advances the fundamental claim of his critique: Orientalism *creates* space. It constructs the very categories of difference and distance that both secure its object of study and its own status as a viable academic discipline. The geographic divisions that Orientalism takes to be true and meaning-bearing are not natural features of the earth’s topography. They are expressions of force, inscribed upon it by a hand (or a voice) located elsewhere, outside, separated by space.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 57.

At turns, Said equates Orientalist writing with fiction, mythology, magic, and imaginative geography. All of these figurative associations underscore the way in which Orientalism creates, makes, and fantasizes. However, Said's most compelling comparison brings a complex interplay between space, vision, and representation to the fore. He describes Orientalism as theatre. But the Orientalist theatre is an unusual space, at once tied to and separated from those who create and consume it:

The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe. An Orientalist is but the particular specialist in knowledge for which Europe at large is responsible, in the way that an audience is historically and culturally responsible for (and responsive to) dramas technically put together by the dramatist.<sup>18</sup>

In the Orientalist theatre, the audience is responsible for and responds to the work of the playwright, while the playwright is responsible for and responds to Europe. In this way, audience and playwright are joined, both equally part of and participants in a very particular set of cultural myths and expectations, shaped by centuries of Orientalist production. Images of the Orient sustain them and move between them, in a kind of infinite and reassuring visual reverberation. The Orient exists because the Orientalist makes it so and because the audience believes it to be. In describing the Orientalist stage as a closed field attached to Europe, Said evacuates Orientalist claims to spatial distance. The image rendered by this cycle of production and consumption

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 63.

belongs to Europe. It is made by and for the West, no matter the linguistic boundaries it erects between them.

Said's understanding of the Orientalist stage likewise evacuates any claims to referential truth. The performance that unfolds upon it bears no resemblance to the very real bodies that populate non-European soil. The *real* distance grows between the Orient and the world it claims to represent. This referential failure certainly owes to the theatrical qualities of Orientalism, to which the stage metaphor draws particular attention. This failure also owes to the ontological qualities of writing, qualities that need no metaphoric figures to grasp and encapsulate them, as they are intrinsic and literal aspects of the Orientalist project. One final and essential passage articulates the limits of written representation, as Said understands them:

In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation. The value efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the Orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such *real thing* as "the Orient." Thus all of Orientalism stands forth and away from the Orient: that Orientalism makes any sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient.<sup>19</sup>

The claim is simple. Real bodies, real flesh cannot be represented with a pen, the page, and words. Such re-presentations will always be closer to the writers who produce them, than the bodies they aim to re-produce. The real bodies continue,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

unrepresented, elsewhere. And with this, Orientalism collapses. Said offers no path forward, no way to rethink the discipline. It cannot (and should not) be recuperated.<sup>20</sup>

In his remarkable analysis of ethnographic writing, Johannes Fabian locates two categories of difference that influence the development of anthropology and continue to inform written ethnographic practice well after World War II, the first of which he shares with Said: spatial distance. Fabian notes that in both popular and scientific antecedents to anthropological study, the central preoccupation was “with the description of movements and relations in *space* (‘geography’) based primarily on visual observation of foreign *places*.”<sup>21</sup> Spatial distance defines the role of ethnographer and that of ethnographic subject in significant ways. Like the Orientalist and his/her Oriental subject, they belong to different geographies, different parts of the world. Fabian further argues that what distinguishes ethnographer from ethnographic subject entails far more than the sheer fact of spatial distance and difference. The ethnographer moves, travels, changes positions. S/he initiates these geographic shifts

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<sup>20</sup> In his essay, “The West—A Dialogic Prescription or Proscription,” Naoki Sakai similarly dismantles the geographic distinctions between the West and elsewhere. Sakai argues, “Neither the West nor the modern is ever determined by one single qualification or gradient. The gradients one is caught in are never singular; one always engages with multiple gradients. Yet the inference regarding the two qualities applies to the other co-existing qualities, with the result that, even if a number of them are supposed to refer to the West, they are neither necessarily co-possible with nor contradictory to one another [...] The West is never an internally coherent entity. At first glance, the West may appear to be a subject consisting of an organically systematized set of predicates; yet, as my argument has demonstrated, the West should be regarded as an accidental composite of such predicates which are, in fact, independent of each other,” (189). Although the West once served the social sciences as a geographic and demographic sign, or a stable mythology, these terms become increasingly tenuous in the modern era. The boundaries between nations, cultures, races, and places collapse. An individual may be of the “West” in one context, and of the “Rest” in another. S/he might also be both at once. Sakai redefines the terms as the product of “dialogue”: “Whereas the difference of the West from the Rest cannot entirely evade cartographic, geographic, or geopolitical connotation, it must at the same time be temporal and indeterminate [...] because it is a social (and dialogic) relating. In this difference, people act, change and redefine themselves in relation to each other,” (179). While Said empties and discards the division between the West and elsewhere, Sakai empties and redefines them as relational, flexible, and ever-changing terms. Sakai’s notion of “dialogue” resonates with the theories of reflexivity that Fabian and other critics of anthropology hypothesize. See Naoki Sakai, “The West—A Dialogic Prescription or Proscription,” *Social Identities* 11, no. 3 (May 2005): 177-195.

<sup>21</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983): 7.

and makes proximity possible. The privilege of mobility gives way to military conquest and colonial invasion. During the Enlightenment, it becomes tied to processes of self-discovery and philosophical inquiry. Fabian writes, “For the established bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, travel was to become (at least potentially) every man’s source of ‘philosophical,’ secular knowledge. Religious travel had been *to* the centers of religion, or *to* the souls to be saved; now secular travel was *from* the centers of learning and power to places where man was to find nothing but himself.”<sup>22</sup> Rather than a means to an end, travel becomes an end in itself. The very act of changing place and moving in space constitutes the acquisition of information. The gap between ethnographer and ethnographic subject thus expands, as the two are separated not only by vast geographic distances, but also philosophical reflection, cognitive ability, and self-awareness. Fabian thus joins Said in exploring the “far more interesting” relationships between geography and knowledge that written ethnographic practice creates and articulates, over and again.

Departing from Said’s critical schema, Fabian understands space and time as mutually imbricated categories of difference. Ethnographic practice binds spatial distance and temporal disjunction together. The ethnographer and the ethnographic subject belong to different regions of the world *and* different historical moments. Though one can detect this conception of spatial and temporal difference in the framing narratives of Enlightenment-era travel writing—one did not simply travel from Europe to Egypt, but from present to past, knowledge to chaos—it was the evolutionary and natural sciences that began to use time as a tool of organization and classification, wherein time “was no longer the vehicle of a continuous, meaningful story.”<sup>23</sup> Time became a descriptive property, disassociated from history, chronology,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 14.

and linearity. Different people, from different parts of the world, exhibited different temporal qualities. Fabian describes this process as the spatialization of time:

For better or for worse these were the epistemological conditions under which ethnography and ethnology took shape; and they were also the conditions under which an emerging anthropological praxis (research, writing, teaching) came to be linked to colonialism and imperialism [...] It promoted a scheme in terms of which not only past cultures, but all living societies were irrevocably placed on a temporal slope—some upstream, others downstream. Civilization, evolution, development, acculturation, modernization (and their cousins, industrialization, urbanization) are all terms whose conceptual content derives, in ways that can be specified, from evolutionary Time. They all have epistemological dimension apart from whatever ethical, or unethical intentions they may express. A discourse employing such terms as primitive, savage (but also tribal, traditional, Third World, or whatever euphemism is current) does not think, or observe, or critically study the “primitive”; it thinks, observes, studies *in terms* of the primitive. *Primitive* being essentially a temporal concept, is a category, not an object, of Western thought.<sup>24</sup>

As Fabian points out, the ethnographic lexicon takes categorizable, classifiable temporal difference as a fundamental presupposition. The category of “primitive” does not emerge out of ethnographic study, but rather determines the contents of an ethnographic encounter before the fieldwork begins. The ethnographer conducts an ethnographic study so as to determine just how far down on the temporal slope his/her subject belongs. From the outset, there is no question that the ethnographic subject

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 18.

belongs further down and far away, a comfortable physical and temporal distance from the ethnographer him/herself.

The methodological and ideological effects of these presuppositions are many, but two important points should be underscored. First, these presuppositions buttress anthropology's claims to scientific objectivity. Fabian argues, "Distance in space and time and, in fact, a different Time are made the prerequisites not only for certain ways of doing anthropology but for its very existence."<sup>25</sup> Temporal and spatial difference define the ethnographer as inherently more mature, more civilized, and more capable of understanding and articulating the essential features of another culture than any member of that culture. The ethnographer *must* speak for the ethnographic subject, for the alternative would be absolute silence. Second, the presupposition of multi-layered difference inserts such insurmountable space between ethnographer and ethnographic subject that their separation seems to mimic that of microbiologist and microbe, archaeologist and artifact: they belong to different orders of being. The ethnographic subject becomes a petrified relic of pre/history, an object ripe for the scientific inquiries of the living, breathing, thinking ethnographer. This second effect can be detected in the content of ethnographic writing, which expands the boundaries of ethnographic scholarship beyond the limitless possibilities of observation and comparison. The ethnographer observes, describes, and compares the differences between geographies, cultures, and bodies, but s/he also organizes them into categories of time. Present. Past. Prehistory. The ethnographer maps an ancient and inaccessible past with present, cotemporaneous bodies.

For Fabian, the spatio-temporal divide between ethnographer and ethnographic subject marks a rupture between methodology and expression, experience and representation. In its twentieth-century formation, anthropology consists of two

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 68.

distinct practices: fieldwork and writing. The former requires that the ethnographer share time and space with his/her subject. For at least a few weeks, though often several months, the life of the ethnographer and that of his/her subject uniquely coincide. The practice of participant observation—a standard ethnographic method that began with the work of Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas in the 1910s—encourages ethnographers to immerse and observe. While anthropology was therefore a discipline grounded in vision and proximity, it continued to define the ethnographer as a distant and detached cultural observer. When Malinowski's field diaries were published in 1967, another fracture in the foundations of the discipline emerged. The marked division between the ethnographer's field notes and his formal ethnographic publications shattered the myth of ethnographic objectivity. Fabian captures this newly apparent feature of the discipline with the term “autobiographic”:

Anthropological writing may be scientific; it is also inherently autobiographic [...] All anthropological writing must draw on reports resulting from some sort of concrete encounter between individual ethnographers and members of other cultures and societies. The anthropologist who does not draw on his own experience will use accounts by others. Directly or vicariously, anthropological discourse formulates knowledge that is rooted in an author's autobiography. If this is seen together with the convention that fieldwork comes first and analysis later, we begin to realize that the Other as object or content of anthropological knowledge is necessarily part of the knowing subject's past.<sup>26</sup>

Rarely are these two things “seen together” and it is precisely this lack of acknowledged visual, spatial, and temporal coexistence that both forms the nucleus of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 87-88.



Fabian's critique and inspires a number of "autobiographical" ethnographies in the 1970s and after.<sup>27</sup> Until this disciplinary crisis, written ethnographic practice eliminated any and all traces of the intersubjective experiences that constitute fieldwork. It privileged spatial distance and temporal difference—as well as the "fragments of ideology" that adhere to these distinctions—above the very real ground of experience and communication that make written analysis possible. The ethnographer communicated this occlusion through a number of rhetorical adjustments. Instead of a first person account of past experiences in the field, ethnographic writing relied upon third person pronominal expressions and the present tense. Instead, of "I saw" or "I learned," the ethnographer asserted, "they are." The third person pronoun reiterated and reaffirmed spatial and temporal differences expressed elsewhere in the ethnographic text (via categories of spatialized past time). It excluded the ethnographic subject from the very dialogue s/he helped to produce. The shared visual and/or verbal exchange between an ethnographizing "I" and an ethnographed "you" collapsed, transformed into a dialogue between writer and reader. The present tense similarly circumscribed the ethnographic subject with temporal immobility, lacing his/her image with "assumptions about repetitiveness, predictability, and conservatism of primitives."<sup>28</sup> Taken together, these devices of spatial and temporal distancing denied intersubjectivity, coevalness, and, more generally, existential similarity. They created what Fabian terms "schizogenic time," contributing to "a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological

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<sup>27</sup> For examples of autobiographic ethnographies, see Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan Dialogues* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Paul Rabinow *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>28</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 81.

discourse.”<sup>29</sup> The ethnographic subject moved between ancient history and the ethnographic present, never resting in the field, at a very particular moment in the ethnographer’s past.

Unlike Said, Fabian defends the indexical possibilities of ethnographic representation and the value of anthropology as an academic discipline.<sup>30</sup> Fabian advocates for a new “convention which distinguishes between *reflexion* qua subjective activity carried out by and revealing the ethnographer,” rather than the tradition of “*reflection*, as a sort of objective reflex (like the image in a mirror) which hides the observer by axiomatically eliminating subjectivity.”<sup>31</sup> In this shift from reflection to reflexion, Fabian envisions an ethnography that represents past encounters and moments of shared communication, rather than bodies-as-objects suspended in temporal ether. Reflexive ethnography collapses the distinction between fieldwork and writing, experiments with new modes of address, and abandons the grammatical flourishes of pseudo-scientific discourse. In turn, the ethnographer becomes an observing body among other observing bodies, all of which necessarily coexist in space and time. Fabian’s prescriptions would seem to suggest cinematic forms. And, indeed, tucked between claims about ethnographic intersubjectivity and reflexion, he

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>30</sup> Fabian is not alone in his efforts to rethink, reimagine, and remake the discipline. James Clifford and George E. Marcus argue, “Even the best ethnographic texts—serious, true fictions—are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot control. Ethnographic truths are thus inherently *partial*—committed and incomplete. This point is now widely asserted—and resisted at strategic points by those who fear the collapse of clear standards of verification. But once accepted and built into ethnographic art, a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact,” (7). See *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). In the wake of anthropology’s disciplinary crisis, a number of scholars and collections examined the rhetorical strategies of written ethnographic practice and proposed a variety of alternative ethnographies, including reflexive and literary forms, as well as experimentations with dialogue, pastiche, and memoir. See Michael Fisher and George Marcus *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Dell Hymes, *Reinventing Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); George Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 90.

writes that in visual anthropology, “[m]y feeling is that, paradoxically, we may have a movement here which is directed against the limited effects of visualism on a theory of knowledge. At least some visual anthropologists affirm the importance of intersubjective experience of Time and explore hermeneutic approaches to visual data (see Ruby 1980).”<sup>32</sup> This admission, however provocative, gives way to utter silence on the potential of cinema. Fabian only hints at how ethnographic cinema might transform or undermine his claims about the spatio-temporal relationships at work in traditional forms of ethnographic writing. Furthermore, in guiding readers toward the writing of Jay Ruby, Fabian articulates a small temporal division of his own. The ethnographic past was written. Whatever shifts cinema might contribute to the discipline belong to the experimental futures of visual anthropology.

For readers of Fabian’s critique, his occlusion of early ethnographic cinema does not register as a significant oversight. Fabian engages the history, development, and expressive forms of written ethnographic practice. He devotes very little descriptive energy to the details of an alternative or reflexive ethnography, regardless of whether he understands that alternative as a textual or visual one. Nevertheless, in their rigorous attention to the specificity of written ethnography, the work of both Johannes Fabian and Edward Said invites a similarly rigorous engagement of *other* ethnographic media, of the material and ontological conditions that constitute them, and of the spatial and temporal strategies they communicate. In what remains of this chapter, I would like to move from written ethnography to moving ethnography, from writing to cinema. My analysis is influenced by Said’s and Fabian’s methodologies, by their careful attention to the textual forms that both produce subjects of ethnographic inquiry and structure the broader field of ethnographic practice. My analysis is also guided by the very particular conclusions that they draw. I aim to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 123.

evaluate these claims upon cinematic ground: What is the space and time of early ethnographic cinema?

*Beyond Taxidermy: Death, Dance, and Genre*

In her reading of *Nanook of the North* (1922), Fatimah Tobing Rony describes the work of Robert Flaherty as “taxidermy.”<sup>33</sup> The taxidermic image, like the taxidermied body, “seeks to make that which is dead look as if it were living.”<sup>34</sup> A stranger irony still: the taxidermist—often euphemistically referred to as a “naturalist”—must kill his/her subject, so that it can be brought back to life, a stilled representation of its former self. This rich conceptual paradigm—moving image as taxidermic preservation—not only suggests that the image of the Inuit family oscillates between movement and stillness, life and death, but also aligns the very process of filmmaking with an act of violence and mutilation. The camera captures, kills, and stills. The understanding of ethnography-as-taxidermy likewise challenges the indexicality of the film image. Rony writes, “In order to make a visual representation of indigenous peoples, one must believe that they are dying, as well as use artifice to make a picture which appears more true, more pure.”<sup>35</sup> *Nanook of the North* does not present life as it is or was, in all of its supposed degeneration and destruction, but life as imagined by Western explorers, travel writers, and ethnographic filmmakers. Like the taxidermied bodies that populate life exhibits at the natural history museum, *Nanook of the North* offers only the scantest shells of early twentieth-century Inuit bodies, of lives that once were in a real place and time. Beneath their cinematic skins, one finds a batting of grasses and leaves. Bodies and limbs arranged just so, in a lifelike fantasy of struggle and survival. In thinking the film as taxidermy, Rony separates surface and

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<sup>33</sup> Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 99-126.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 102.

underbelly, representation and reality. Rather than dismissing the well-documented manipulations that unfolded behind-the-scenes (reenactments, inaccurate costumes, etc.), Rony reads them as a necessary part of the film world, as well as Flaherty's ethnographic mode. The taxidermic cinema, like the Orientalist text, passes over the actual to signify a fictional constellation of images and ideas.

As a paradigm for analyzing ethnographic film, taxidermy gathers together a number of provocative assertions, theoretical associations, and historical collisions. Before the advent of cinema, visual ethnography consisted largely of *actual* taxidermy. Rony foregrounds this violent genealogy, collapsing the distinction between killing and filming. But taxidermy and the camera intertwined with startling frequency throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finis Dunaway traces the roots of nature photography to the rifle. In the late nineteenth century, gun and camera circulated freely among the elite members of the hunting party. Networks of "artist-hunters" or "camera-hunters" began to form, joined by a shared interest in conservation, aesthetics, and the transformative power of the American landscape. These men "longed to regain primal instincts through gun hunting; they desired to fix the primeval landscape through camera hunting."<sup>36</sup> The overlap between camera and gun, observation and penetration fascinates Susan Sontag and shapes much of her writing on the photographic image.<sup>37</sup> Both Donna Haraway and Mark Alvey explore the union of taxidermy and filmmaking in the figure of Carl Akeley. Akeley played a central role in the development of taxidermic practice in the United States and Europe. He was also the inventor of the Akeley camera whose "freewheeling damped-action gyroscopic tripod head [...] allowed the operator to pan and tilt with a steady, fluid

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<sup>36</sup> Finis Dunaway, "Hunting with the Camera: Nature Photography, Manliness, and Modern Memory, 1890-1930," *Journal of American Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 220.

<sup>37</sup> See Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977) and *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003).

motion, using a handle mounted on top of the camera.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the very person who perfected the taxidermic stillness of the life exhibit, brought an unprecedented fluidity of motion to the field of ethnographic cinema.

Beyond these historical intersections, and the intriguing associations they form, Rony’s term establishes a firm link between *Nanook of the North* and Bazinian mummification, which I discuss in Chapter One. She argues, “Taxidermy is also deeply religious: when Bazin writes that the mummy complex is the impulse behind the evolution of technologies of realism—‘To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life’—one is reminded of the image of the sleeping Nanook.”<sup>39</sup> That Allakariallak—the actor who played the sleeping Nanook—died only two years after the film was released, Rony suggests, adds to the authenticity of the film-as-taxidermy/mummy. Rony makes no distinction between the specific ontology Bazin addresses and that of Flaherty’s work, between the photographic and the film image; nor does she distinguish between written and visual ethnography. Instead, Rony understands the film as a visual extension of schizogenic time. She sketches Fabian’s view and writes, “The cinema of Flaherty worked in the same way: Nanook and his family were represented in a cinematic ‘ethnographic present’ in which intertitles establish the camera, and thus the filmmaker, as observer.”<sup>40</sup> While one might struggle to bring together “the ethnographic present,” the Bazinian mummy, and ethnographic taxidermy in coherent detail, the central thrust of her critique marks an important rethinking of early ethnographic cinema. Taxidermy quickly displaced the framework of “salvage ethnography” through which Flaherty, and early ethnographic

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Alvey, “The Cinema as Taxidermy: Carl Akeley and the Preservative Obsession,” *Framework* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 33; See also Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>39</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 104.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

cinema more generally, had been understood theretofore.<sup>41</sup> And rightly so. Flaherty's infamous claim—"Sometimes you have to lie. One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit"—is not an unfortunate admission by one of the founding figures of documentary film. It is a very particular description of an ethnographic methodology. Rony rightly insists that we read Flaherty's distortions carefully. In the end, however, *Nanook of the North* represents but one among a small collection of docu-fiction ethnographic films and taxidermy proves difficult to generalize beyond its boundaries, precisely where this chapter aims to move.

In her careful study of visual anthropology, Alison Griffiths explores the earliest glimmers of expedition filmmaking and pays considerable attention to a series of films made by Alfred Cort Haddon during the Torres Strait expedition of 1898. Drawing upon Noël Burch's theorization of haptic space, as well as Tom Gunning's notion of the "cinema of attractions," Griffiths argues that these early images unsettled anthropologists and natural history museums. She writes, "It was cinema's ability to render the ethnographic body with such fidelity, ocular pleasure, and tactility that perhaps presented one of the greatest challenges to anthropologists; film, with its inalienable lifelike qualities, may have posed troubling questions to the privileging of sight as the paroxysm of anthropological knowledge."<sup>42</sup> In their simplicity, Haddon's expedition films threaten to overwhelm the viewer with sensory detail. They emphasize the physical over the analytical, the bodily over the cognitive. Like the Lumière *cinématographes*—also discussed in Chapter One—these films extend seamlessly across a single shot, one canister of film. The images seem to reach out to

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<sup>41</sup> As I discuss in the introduction and Chapter Two, salvage ethnography is a mode of ethnographic practice that perceives its subject of study as pure and fragile, always and necessarily on the brink of death. Salvage ethnography claims to preserve the world's cultures before and against Western technologies and practices corrupt them.

<sup>42</sup> Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 142.

the audience, to invite touch and incite bodily sensation. Haddon's films likewise challenged the specular and scientific authority of the ethnographer. Contact with other bodies and other landscapes appeared direct and unmediated. Subjects could return the gaze of the filmmaker or refuse to be filmed. Insofar as "the film camera can powerfully evoke both the profilmic landscape and human figure, the performers featured on film come across as subjectivities and cultural identities rather than objects reified by the dehumanizing gaze of the ethnographic sideshow."<sup>43</sup> As Griffiths understands them, these early expedition films create a sense of spatial extension and temporal immediacy at distinct odds with the fantasies of difference wrought by Robert Flaherty. Despite the potentially threatening possibilities or frustrating refusals that these early films posed to institutions of colonial or anthropological authority, the film camera continued to join ethnographers, explorers, colonial officials, and missionaries in the field.

The majority of expedition films neither wholly adheres to the narrative forms of popular ethnography, nor transmits an incomprehensible array of bodily forms. But one cannot wholly cast aside the limits that Griffiths and Rony articulate. On the one hand, life and presence; on the other, distance and death. The films that I intend to explore teeter somewhere in-between: in-between narrative structure and eruptive display, in-between sense and sensation, in-between presence and absence. To be clear, I am not describing a cinema of equilibrium or balance. Rather, early expedition films swing from one mode of expression to another, from one structural device to another. These films are also the historical in-between: in-between the exciting first films of the late nineteenth century and the "real" documentaries that begin with Robert Flaherty and John Grierson. They are the in-between that constitutes the majority of the holdings in ethnographic film collections around the world. And, they

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 168.



are the films necessarily under consideration if one wants to understand the spatial and temporal expressions of early ethnographic cinema. These films reflect an incredible range of geographies and events, and, while they surely differ more than they overlap, significant patterns can be detected within and across this diverse collection of images. These patterns demand inquiry and analysis. They likewise suggest that a coherent, if not collective, understanding of ethnographic cinema—what it should be, what it should show, and how it should mean—threads these films together.

In 1901, Edwin S. Porter made a single-shot narrative film entitled *Terrible Teddy: The Grizzly King*. A “side-splitting burlesque,” the film features a fictional Theodore Roosevelt—at the time, the Vice President of the United States, an avid hunter, and a frequent contributor to the collections of the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH)—traipsing down a snowy hillside in the wilds of Colorado, gun in hand, trailed by a cameraman and a journalist.<sup>44</sup> A housecat-sized feline attacks the intrepid marksman and Roosevelt slaughters the beast with a bowie knife. The journalist scribbles on an enormous notepad, while the cameraman cranks away, his lens meeting Porter’s. In 1901, the film surely delivered a satiric punch, reducing the tough and terrible Teddy to a clumsy killer of kittens and a desperate seeker of fame. More germane to my inquiry here, the film presents a strangely prophetic vision of ethnographic cinema to come and of the role that the film camera would play in capturing explorers, hunters, and ethnographers in the world’s supposedly untamed wildernesses. Theodore Roosevelt himself would eventually

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<sup>44</sup> The Edison Films Catalog describes the film thusly: “A burlesque on Theodore Roosevelt hunting mountain lions in Colorado and taken from the New York Journal and Advertiser. The scene opens in a very picturesque wood. Teddy with his large teeth is seen running down the hill with his gun in hand, followed by his photographer and press agent. He reconnoiters around a large tree and finally discovers the mountain lion. He kneels on one knee and makes a careful shot. Immediately upon the discharge of his gun a huge black cat falls from the tree and Teddy whips out his bowie knife, leaps on the cat and stabs it several times, then poses while his photographer makes a picture and the press agent writes up the thrilling adventure. A side splitting burlesque.” See *Edison Films Catalog* 105 (July 1901): 72.

make several significant contributions to early ethnographic cinema. Immediately after the close of his administration in 1909, Roosevelt left for a yearlong safari of east and central Africa with his son, Kermit.<sup>45</sup> Andrew Carnegie financed the trip, Cherry Kearton filmed it, and a number of scientists from the Smithsonian Institution accompanied the group. In total, the party collected 11,397 animals, 512 of which were big game. The specimens were divided between the Smithsonian and AMNH. In 1910, *Roosevelt in Africa* was released to American audiences eager to see their former president's highly publicized African adventures. Four years later, Roosevelt repeated the process as a member of the Roosevelt-Rondon Scientific Expedition through the Brazilian jungle and down the River of Doubt (Rio da Dúvida). In 1928, *The River of Doubt* was released (supplemented with images from George Dyott's voyage in 1926). Roosevelt's fame as an American politician and an avid hunter surely fueled public interest in his cinematic self. However, between roughly 1910 and 1930, hundreds of expedition films were made, featuring far less compelling screen personalities.

Within the expedition genre, the hunt operates as both a central theme and a structural device. However, this visual event neither reproduces the divisions of schizogenic time, nor preserves its subjects in a mummified or taxidermic state. Representations of the hunt in early ethnographic cinema do not attempt to make "that which is dead look as if it were living." In sharp contrast, these films detail an often gruesome transition from life to death, as well as the extensive efforts required to produce a taxidermic rebirth. Indeed, these films pull back the taxidermic curtain. They undo the lifelike appearances that populate the corridors and glass enclosures of the natural history museum. And, as I will explain, they likewise destabilize the

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<sup>45</sup> "Kermit Roosevelt Tells of Big Hunt: Into the Wilds of Africa for a Year, Out of Touch with the World," *New York Times* (July 2, 1908).

coherence of the expedition film itself, puncturing the journey across space and through time with an unassimilable visual rupture, a spatial and temporal void.

Among the very earliest expedition films of the 1910s, one finds the popular sub-genre of the “hunt film.” The hunt film is a five to ten minute distillation of months’ worth of travel into a single, spectacular event: the killing, skinning, and dividing of an animal into parts. A small sampling of French hunt films includes *Chasse à l’hippopotame sur le nil bleu* (1908), *Chasse à la panthère* (1909), *Chasse à l’Ouganda* (1910), *La Chasse au maribout en Abyssinie* (1911), *Chasse au éléphants sur les bords de Nyanza* (1911), *Chasse à l’opossum* (1912); American museums and film theaters exhibited *A Hippopotamus Hunt* (1911), *A Tiger Hunt, Indo-China* (1914), *The Capture of a Sea Elephant* (1914), and *Giraffe Hunt, Africa* (1915). The plot of the hunt film is frequently formed and limited by the events that unfold in the field: the search for and discovery of the animal(s); the shooting or stabbing of the animal(s); the return to camp, with the animal(s) or animal part(s) in tow. The concluding image often displays a disembodied animal head, lifelessly engaging the camera. Final frame as visual and virtual trophy. Alternatively, a selection of hunt films frame the event as an industrial and/or scientific process. These films move through the hunt—from search party to dead animal—but conclude in the natural history museum or artisanal studio to reveal the objects or products that the animal becomes in its material or taxidermic afterlife.

Alfred Machin, a Pathé cameraman who accompanied a number of amateur sportsmen and scientists across Africa, specialized in the hunt film form. He made at least one hunt film per year between 1908 and 1913, and his work constitutes a considerable portion of the expedition archives.<sup>46</sup> His film, *Chasseurs d’ivoire* (1912),

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<sup>46</sup> A pair of monkeys survive his final film, *La Chasse aux singes*. In an interesting turn of events, Machin left the field of expedition films in 1920. He soon became famous for a series of animal-comedy films starring a chimpanzee named Auguste.

typifies the form and visual content of the genre. Through a complex series of physical and visual encounters between hunter, native, and animal, the film communicates multiple and contradictory “times.” These temporal expressions neither adhere to Fabian’s schizogenic formula nor communicate unadorned simultaneity and co-presence. Rather, the film cycles through multiple pasts, presences, and absences that are not neatly separated by space, shot, or subject. These temporal expressions bleed into one another, influence one another, and eventually trouble the broader field of expedition cinema as the hunt takes its place among a handful of generic conventions.

*Chasseurs d’ivoire* begins with two unidentified hunters, guns in hands and pith helmets on heads, walking through tall grasses with a troupe of native men at their sides. The film cuts to an image of elephants in the distance and back to the hunters as they take aim, crouching in the grass. Both hunters fire their guns (Figure 3.1). An intertitle reinserts that which has been omitted by the cut (or perhaps never actually captured on film). It reads, “Struck with a bullet in the middle of the forehead, the giant is shot down; only the slightest quivers still travel through its large ears.” A long shot of the elephant emerges, its enormous body almost parallel to the camera (Figure 3.2). Its ears and trunk move slowly and, soon enough, not at all. The hunters and their native counterparts rush toward the animal, encircling its body. The film cuts to a close-up of the elephant’s head, facing the camera and filling the frame. Human hands touch its face and tug at its ears and trunk, bringing the animal temporarily back to life and movement. Fingers gesture to the bullet hole and recede, leaving behind only an encounter between the elephant and the camera (Figure 3.3). The final seconds of the shot could be a still life, a photograph, or a taxidermied trophy, mounted on the wall. An intertitle explains, “We leave the elephant meat to the natives, who cook it according to special rituals.” From here, the film divides into



Figure 3.1  
*Chasseurs d'ivoire*



Figure 3.2  
*Chasseurs d'ivoire*

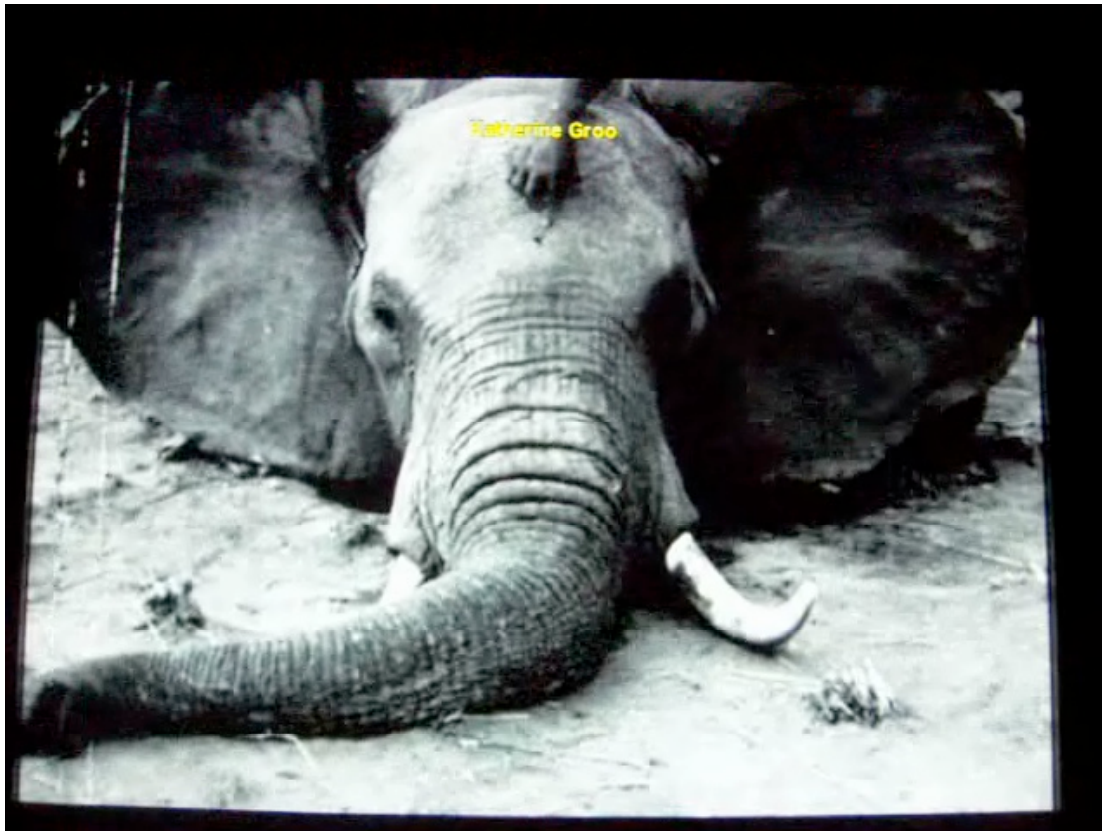


Figure 3.3  
*Chasseurs d'ivoire*

Africa and elsewhere. The European hunters are nowhere to be found. The film returns to the elephant, now splayed on its back and surrounded by natives. Its stomach has been cut open and smoke billows from it, as bodies jump and dance around the carcass (Figure 3.4). Another intertitle explains, “The teeth of the elephant weigh 50 to 100 kilograms.” Yet again, *Chasseurs d’ivoire* shifts time and place. No longer in the grasslands of an unnamed African country, alongside the eager rifles of European hunters, the film abandons Africa and continues in the studios of ivory carvers. People in lab coats examine tusks. They sand and cut and carve. The final image of the film justifies the voyage and explains why we were “over there,” hiding in the grass. It reveals an elaborate trunk filled with the latest devices of home beauty: an array of ivory-handled mirrors, nail files, brushes, and bottles, each tucked into its own velvety compartment (Figure 3.5). The film totals six minutes in length, three of which are devoted to this final display of artisanal skill.

Upon preliminary consideration, *Chasseurs d’ivoire* fashions an easy antidote to schizogenic time. While the film invites spectators to gaze upon the unfamiliar subjects that gather within its frames—be they the high grasses of an African savannah or the actual bodies that carry supplies—the familiar and the unfamiliar are simultaneously present in the visual field. European and African alike encircle the elephant’s body, touch its skin, and prod its limbs. The European hunter and the African native share an experience and the same window of existence, however briefly. Of course, at the center of the hunt, of any hunt, one finds a visual repudiation and a temporal disruption: the death of an animal. How can one understand this event? What is its time and place?

For Tom Gunning, representations of death and dying fall firmly within the boundaries of the “cinema of attractions,” along with the shocks and thrills of filmed





Figure 3.4  
*Chasseurs d'ivoire*



Figure 3.5  
*Chasseurs d'ivoire*

magic shows, car accidents, and strip teases.<sup>47</sup> Such lurid delights reflect life in the turn-of-the-century metropolis, as well as the boundaries of pre-narrative cinematic form. It is a cinema of the body—of uncontrollable laughter, screams, goose bumps, and uneasy stomachs—rather than a cinema of meaning, sense, and understanding. Drawing upon Heidegger’s conceptualization of “the moment,” Leo Charney thickens Gunning’s analysis, sketching the temporal and perceptual stakes of the turn-of-the-century city and its cinema.<sup>48</sup> For Charney, the early film image was but one of a vast array of sensorial shocks, ephemera, and stimulations that combined to form the modern cityscape, as well as a new mode of reception. Charney explains:

The cognition of the moment and the sensation of the moment can never inhabit the same moment [...] This evacuation of the present had far-reaching consequences for the experience of modernity. For if sensation and cognition cannot inhabit the same moment, then the present is always lost. To the extent that ‘presence’ names a category of consciousness, it exists only through the ability to recognize it. Yet that recognition cannot happen in the same moment that presence happens.<sup>49</sup>

Charney describes a frustrating play between sensual possibilities and cognitive impossibilities. The shocks and spectacles of early cinema register within and upon the body of the viewer, but in doing so they mark a cognitive absence and a temporal disjunction. Charney thus articulates a new form of schizogenic time, grounded in a theory of perception and reception, rather than representation. The body of the

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<sup>47</sup> For an excellent synthesis of the “cinema of attractions,” see Tom Gunning, “The Aesthetics of Astonishment: Early Film and the Incredulous Spectator,” *Art and Text* 34 (Spring 1989): 114-133.

<sup>48</sup> Leo Charney, “In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity,” *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 279-296.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

spectator divides. It feels and thinks at different moments, split by the eruptive force of the unassimilable image. In other words, one cannot simultaneously see, feel, and understand. When the image coheres, when one can understand it, both the image and its sensorial complement have receded. Passed and past tense. Charney likewise links this play of presence and absence to Jean Epstein's notion of *Photogénie*, or, "fleeting fragments of experience that provide pleasure in ways that the viewer cannot describe verbally or rationalize cognitively."<sup>50</sup> The moment of *Photogénie* arrives as a breaking through of the everyday, linear communications with a sudden rush of shock, sensation, or emotion: a moment of utter disorientation.

In her illuminating treatise on cinematic time, which I gloss in Chapter One, Mary Ann Doane locates a similar cognitive resistance in the early film image.<sup>51</sup> However, unlike Charney, she makes no case for a recuperation of (eventual) sense. This is particularly true for a film like *Electrocuting an Elephant* (Edison, 1903), which combines the event of death with "the stamp of an authenticity that is derived from the technological capacities of the camera."<sup>52</sup> Doane argues that, in early actualities of executions and mortal wounds, death registers "as a cinematic Ur-event because it appears as the zero-degree of meaning, its evacuation."<sup>53</sup> For Doane, the representation of death marks a chasm, an irreparable gap, and a temporal void. Death disrupts narrative coherence and refuses understanding. Like so many early cinematic visions, the image of death shocks the viewer and very often catalyzes some kind of physical, bodily response. As an experience or event in the world, death marks the limits of life, of being. As a cinematic image, however, death marks the limits of visual representation. Death resists visual capture. It escapes, like the physical bullet

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 164.

buried in the flesh. It is a non-visual event that happens elsewhere. In the body, beneath the surface. As viewers, we are left only with the trace, the wound, and the inadequacies of the visible, wounded flesh.

Like Gunning, Doane understands these visual failures as historically bound to early cinema. In the rise of narrative forms, she perceives a movement away from the threatening contingency of death toward condensed, controlled time. Narrative structure and precise editing schemes restore meaning and reliable, visible events. That is to say, the shift from sensation to understanding does not unfold within or upon a viewing subject, but across film history. Narrative structure makes sense of the senseless or the purely sensational. She writes:

In the cinema, the tendency to depict death in this form, in a direct and unmediated way for the gaze of the spectator, lasted only a brief period of film history, a period that is also bound up with speculations about the new technology itself (what it is for, what it can do). Just as electricity could be activated as a technological control over life and death, the cinema must have seemed to offer the same promise in the field of representation [...] Technology's veiled assurances of compensating for the limitations of the body, that is, its finitude, would be synonymous with a hope of conquering death. But to the extent that the spontaneous and the unpredictable seemed to invade the image of the actuality, to the extent that the image cannot speak its own relation to temporality, narrative proved to be a more effective and surer means of assimilating the unassimilable by conferring on death a meaning. The direct presentation of death to the spectator as pure event, as shock, was displaced in mainstream cinema by its narrativization. Technology

and narrative form an alliance in modernity to ameliorate the corrosiveness of the relation between time and subjectivity.<sup>54</sup>

Ethnographic cinema gets omitted from this alliance. In the expedition film, new technologies and editing techniques do not ameliorate the corrosiveness of the contingent or the incomprehensible. Instead, the creation of “time as an effect” paradoxically widens the field of experimentation. It invites *more* representations of death and, as I will soon explore, more indecipherable bodies in motion.

*Chasseurs d’ivoire* is not a single-shot actuality or an uninterrupted representation of death as it unfolds. Like the expedition films to come, it creates “time as an effect.” Cuts divide shots. Images are arranged so as to transmit a simple narrative. Time and space are organized clearly and concisely. A walk through the forest. Elephants in the distance. Hunters take aim and fire. Taken together, these segments constitute a coherent narrative and condensed time. Rather than recording an uninterrupted moment, they “make” the cinematic event out of separate visual, temporal slices. The shots that precede those of the elephant in his final throes could belong to a reenactment or a staged drama. Nevertheless, the scenes of death register as a different film altogether. Though the bullet that kills the elephant may not come from those discharged in the previous shot, the elephant is unmistakably dying when it comes into view. One can see the bullet wound, as well as the vibrant movements of the human figures that interact with the motionless body. In this startling moment of loss and change, the film communicates authenticity, “real” time, and pure contingency. The death of the elephant marks a break in the film and a collapse of narrative sense, oddly figured in the animal’s slashed stomach. But this eruption of death does not mark the end of the film. Instead, the linearity of the pre-mortem narrative structure gives way to post-mortem narrative divisions. The natives dance

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

alone in an unnamed African site, while artisans make vanity mirrors. Death operates as a spatial and temporal void, as well as a catalyst of new narrative forms. One might easily read this visual and narrative separation of African natives from European artisans as an effort to reenact the kind of spatial and temporal divisions that Fabian locates in ethnographic writing. The representation of the natives as the caretakers and consumers of the dead body would likewise seem to establish a visual analogy between animal and native. Both teeter on the brink of death, one gunshot wound away from taxidermic preservation. However, the visual and narrative event of death cannot be so easily contained or assigned. Indeed, one should note that in the aftermath of the elephant's death, it is the hunters that never reappear. Death violently ruptures the narrative, along with temporal and spatial coherence. The effects of this rupture spread indiscriminately across the remainder of the film.

While Gunning, Charney, and Doane help situate the shocks of early cinema within a larger historical and theoretical context (which I have certainly not exhausted in this brief survey), their claims regarding visual exhibitionism, cognitive rupture, and temporal contingency do not engage the essential, structural role that death plays in the ethnographic expedition film. Images of death are not short-lived phenomena of the earliest single-shot films. They are a generic convention of the expedition films that begin to take shape in the 1910s and 1920s, incorporating and expanding upon the condensed violence of the hunt film. The expedition films guarantee the contingency and instability of death made visible, but they also narrate expeditions down rivers, through forests, and across deserts. The result is a strange undulation between sensation and sense, event and structure. Two films from the 1920s typify the forms and content of the expedition film: *Adventures on the Upper Nile* (1927) and *The Captain Marshall Field Brazilian Expedition* (1926). Though both of these films were produced by natural history museums (the American Museum of Natural History and

the Field Museum, respectively), they were screened for large public audiences and include a handful of features that were common in studio entertainment films, including explanatory intertitles and color tinting. These films also share in a simple narrative structure. The beginning of each film marks the beginning of the expedition, while the end of each film marks its end. As with the hunt film, the expedition film foregrounds the presence and participation of the Western anthropologist, explorer, and/or traveler. Western observer and non-western subject mingle on-screen, in the same place and time. The expedition film does not simply deliver the images of the expedition—its human subjects and physical spoils—but the *process* of the expedition as it unfolds. In marked departure from the compact and condensed structure of the hunt film, the expedition film includes the hunt as only one of several events, experienced and recorded along the way.

In *Adventures on the Upper Nile*, the first intertitle explains that the film is, “a pictorial record of the O’Donnell-Clark African Expedition into the Southern Sudan [...] for the purpose of securing specimens of the rare giant eland.”<sup>55</sup> The first half of the film communicates a kind of constant, forward motion toward the euphemistically-described moment of “securing” the animal. Echoing the endless pans in *Les Archives de la Planète*’s film collection, which I discuss in Chapter Two, the traveling shot constitutes the primary visual currency of this, and almost every, expedition film. *Adventures on the Upper Nile* films the Nile—its banks and its waters, its animal and human inhabitants—from aboard a steamer. With each cut, the camera approaches an animal, a village, or another patch of land. As the steamer passes by these focal points, the camera slowly turns, keeping the subject within view. The combined

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<sup>55</sup> The team of anthropologists and field workers on the Clark-O’Donnell expedition included Charles Oliver O’Donnell (AMNH fellow), James Lippitt Clark (AMNH vice-director of preparation and exhibition), John W. Hope (preparator of specimens), Dudley Blakeley (artist and preparator of specimens), and William T. Hunt (artist and preparatory). Jack Robertson filmed the trip.



movements of both steamer and camera create a 180-degree visual field. Each cut brings with it steady movements toward and away from new and, very often, spectacular scenes. Along the way, viewers encounter flocks of wild ducks and cattle, a crocodile chasing its prey, a wildfire and fleeing birds, other boats and paddlers, and villagers gathered at the shoreline. One can even occasionally catch the shadow of the steamer, its cameraman and captain, cast upon the banks. Though the movements of the camera (and the ship) remain the same, this segment of the film registers temporal and physical changes. The boat passes new places and spaces. The camera and crew move ever-closer to the expedition's conclusion. The narrative unfolds in a consistent and comprehensible way. And, in the occasional cast shadow, the film provides a kind of simple, indexical reassurance. Steamer, captain, and cameraman are still there, moving in tandem with the visual world of the film.

Eventually the steamer reaches the "land of the great eland," whereupon the content and form of the film abruptly shift. An intertitle explains, "After many weeks of hard hunting, the great bull eland was secured." From the steady, continual time of the river to the hunt of the eland, the film transforms. As in *Chasseurs d'ivoire*, death disrupts the narrative and changes its direction. The film cuts to a collection of native hunters and pith-helmeted anthropologists in the field. One of the native hunters fires his rifle and the film cuts to a dead eland. The film cuts again. This time, the animal appears skinned and decapitated (Figure 3.6). In a handful of brief scenes, anthropologist and native share the screen as they participate in taxidermic preparations. Clark and O'Donnell tan the skin (Figure 3.7). A collection of unnamed natives clean the skeleton (3.8-3.9). A team of "preparators and artists" gather leaves, make plaster casts, and paint pictures of the surrounding foliage—never mind that a film record is underway. The final ten minutes of the film wander incoherently between two visual foci: a swarm of locusts and a pack of elephants. An intertitle



Figure 3.6  
*Adventures on the Upper Nile*



Figure 3.7  
*Adventures on the Upper Nile*



Figure 3.8  
*Adventures on the Upper Nile*



Figure 3.9  
*Adventures on the Upper Nile*

describes the former, noting that they “covered an area eight miles wide and took over an hour to pass.” However, one no longer knows where those eight miles might be, or when the hour of locusts might have occurred. The camera and, in turn, the spectator are disconnected from space, time, and narrative coherence. The lens gazes upward and the sky appears a swirling canvas of fluttering shadows. Another intertitle warns that “the scourge of Africa moves with the wind but devastation will follow where they settle for the night.” To whom is this warning issued? To the farmers presumably devastated by the locusts? Or to the elephants that the camera hunts in the following frames? In yet another echo of *Chasseurs d’ivoire*, devastation indiscriminately covers the film, bleeds across its cuts.

*The Captain Marshall Field Brazilian Expedition* overlaps with *Adventures on the Upper Nile* in a number of ways. The first portion of the film presents a series of intertitles and images that depict the voyage with patient detail. The film replaces the traveling shots of the Nile River with traveling shots of the Brazilian jungles, taken from aboard a passenger train. Nevertheless, in *The Captain Marshall Field Brazilian Expedition* the hunt structures the film in a different way. Rather than a single hunting expedition, the film presents a series of hunts that follow a rather innocuous cue: “Some of the specimens...” The hunts continue until the film concludes. Twenty-five of the film’s thirty minutes cycle through images of shots firing, animals dying, and anthropologists and natives collecting trophies. This series of hunts resonates with the shifting landscape of *Adventures on the Upper Nile*’s traveling shots, marking the film with visual difference and change. However, the actual content of the hunts, the visions of death and dismemberment that unfold therein, destabilize any sense of movement or progress. Each sequence endeavors anew to get things moving, replacing dead bodies with living ones, but each sequence inevitably repeats that which came before and returns viewers to the non-time of death.

Both *Adventures on the Upper Nile* and *The Captain Marshall Field Brazilian Expedition* communicate coherent time and space through the narrative conceit of expedition, as well as a handful of basic editing, cinematographic, and structural techniques: rudimentary continuity editing, traveling shots, intertitular explanation, etc. And yet, they are equally and problematically structured by the insistent visual event of death. Interestingly, Jean Rouch's first ethnographic film, *Chasse à l'hippopotame* (1948), also follows this visual formula. The film depicts a native hunting trip in Niger and a repetition of stabbings and deaths that stretch across the length of the entire film. Armed with light-weight cameras and synched sound equipment, Rouch had more flexibility and visual access than that of his pre-war counterparts. He was able to capture the blade as it entered the animal's flesh and the haunting cessation of the animal's movements in a single, uninterrupted shot. This film, like the expedition films of the 1910s and 1920s, is structured by an expedition along the Niger River. But time completely recedes in *Chasse à l'hippopotame*, as it does in *The Captain Marshall Field Brazilian Expedition*. Nothing happens save for the endlessly repeated event of death. Though Rouch would later disavow his early work, it should perhaps come as little surprise that he chose the hunt as the central focus of his first film (and one of the very first post-war ethnographic films).

Allow me to return to a few central points here. Insofar as the hunt constitutes an essential part of the generic code of early ethnographic expedition cinema, these films refuse both taxidermic and schizogenic time. Rather than making "that which is dead look as if it were living," these films frequently detail the process by which the living becomes unquestionably dead, as well as the taxidermic efforts to bring it back to life. Though early expedition films may have developed out of anthropology's taxidermic traditions, they do not continue a simple genealogy of temporal and spatial distancing, of life exhibits and colonial expositions. They move behind the scenes of

the natural history museums and their geographically divided corridors. They undo the life exhibit, destabilize its glass divide, and reveal the bloody mess of skin and flesh from whence it comes. This undoing equally appears an undoing of cinema itself, though “undoing” is perhaps not the right term. Early expedition cinema operates as a continuation of a cinema that was never quite “done.” It never wholly adheres to the narrative efforts of both fiction and non-fiction filmmaking to create “time as an effect.” It emerges out of and continues the shocks and contingencies of the earliest single-shot films. Still, it is a structure, but one cobbled together out of the events of an expedition that unfolded coherently, seamlessly, elsewhere.

Representations of dance structure the early expedition genre in much the same way as representations of the hunt. Nearly every expedition film from the 1910s and 1920s contains at least one scene of bodies in motion, dancing. Like the hunt, dance disrupts the linearity of the journey, the simplicity of the film’s forward motion. It operates as a kind of destructive convention, unsettling the very visual form it constitutes, of which it is an essential and necessary part. Indeed, dance serves as yet another site upon which spatial and temporal instabilities gather. However, it communicates a different, though no less disruptive, order of spatial and temporal ambiguity. Dance replaces the incomprehensible depths of death with surfaces of undulating flesh. It overwhelms the image with presence and illegible texture. Dance likewise returns us to the refrain of this chapter. While early expedition cinema creates “time as an effect,” the advent of editing and/or the insertion of intertitles do not stave off the threat of contingency and incomprehensibility. Their introduction to ethnographic cinema only widens the field of experimentation and the visual forms produced therein. The expedition genre neither adheres to the development of narrative cinema, nor simply extends the facile exhibitionism of the cinema of attractions. It traces a different path through film history.



As I discuss at length in Chapter One, dance constitutes a rather large portion of the very earliest film catalogues. Three of Alfred Cort Haddon's five films from the Torres Strait Expedition record native dances.<sup>56</sup> It was one of the first and most frequently represented activities in the pre-narrative film genres. Dancers are scattered throughout the Lumière expedition archives, on stages and in streets, and they were frequently brought into studios to perform in front of the immobile Edison film camera. Like so many single-shot scenes of the "cinema of attractions," the dancing body communicates efficiently and immediately. One does not need intertitles or narrative structure to recognize the dancing body as a human figure and its movements as dance. The exhibitionism of the early dance films is countered only by the enormous variations in dance and movement that emerge between films and across the vast catalogues of early cinema. Each dance film brings with it a different kind of dance, typically communicated through visual markers of racial and ethnic difference, as well as distinguishable differences in gesture and form. In most early dance films, however, these surface distinctions between gesture and kind represent the boundaries of visual knowledge. In other words, these films communicate in a basic indexical way. There is a body. It dances. The dancing body and the dance are African, Asian, Spanish, Russian, etc. One cannot determine who the dancer is, what the dance means, or where/when it unfolds. The dance and the dancer are disconnected from any spatial or temporal distractions. They exist in a kind of representational vacuum, made for and sustained by the film camera and the boundaries of the single-shot film form.

Dance appears as a threatening and thrilling event, always and already on the verge of Dionysian collapse. Jane Desmond argues that the dancing body often operates as a multilayered display of difference. She writes, "Race, gender, and

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<sup>56</sup> Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference*, 134.

cultural otherness double one another, with each register reinforcing the next to produce a hyperbole of ‘Otherness.’ Dancing, as a nonverbal display of the body—most often the female body—provides an especially rich mode of articulation for this process.”<sup>57</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dance satisfies the spectatorial desire for the shocks and thrills of hyperbolic difference. It delivers visions of bodies and flesh to the bodies and flesh in the film theatre. A kind of non-cognitive, cinematic echo inheres. For his part, Derrida relies upon the figure of dance to express the difficulty of “pinning down” the feminine, of locating the “place” of sexual difference: “The most innocent of dances would thwart the *assignation à résidence*, escape those residences under surveillance; the dance changes place and above all changes *places*. In its wake they can no longer be recognized. The joyous disturbance of certain women’s movements, and of some women in particular, has actually brought with it the chance for a certain risky turbulence in the assigning of places within our small European space.”<sup>58</sup> At the same time, the dancing body operates as a container and a structure. It moves through a pattern of prepared and regimented gestures. In early cinema’s continual return to visions of dance, one can detect an effort to retain well-organized structure and visual predictability in the face of the overwhelming possibilities of cinematic movement, temporal contingency, and racial difference. As I underscore elsewhere in this dissertation, dance showcases the movements of the body and cinema’s remarkable capacity to represent those movements, while simultaneously bringing the possibilities of motion and movement under control.

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<sup>57</sup> Jane Desmond, “Dancing out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis’s ‘Radha’ of 1906,” *Signs* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1991): 42.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida and Christie McDonald, “Interview: Choreographies,” *Diacritics* 12 (Summer 1982): 69.

The irreconcilable tensions that meet upon the body of the dancer in early cinema, resisting coherence in a number of ways, intensify in ethnographic films of the 1910s and 1920s. Early ethnographic representations of dance take this undulation between ecstasy and control, the event and the structure further, often inscribing dance within a context of ritual and ceremony. To the shocks and thrills of dancing flesh, early ethnographic cinema adds a tantalizing layer of cultural secrets, communicated by foreign bodies and culled from the dark corners of the globe. To the choreographed patterns of dance, it adds the near-impenetrable layer of history, of centuries' worth of ancestral bodies dancing. The body in ritualized dance cannot deviate, it cannot break down, without disrupting the very ritual it aims to express. bell hooks articulates an important distinction between ritual and spectacle, which I discuss at length in Chapter One: "Ritual is that ceremonial act that carries with it meaning and significance beyond what appears, while spectacle functions primarily as entertaining dramatic display."<sup>59</sup> Many early dance films bring these two categories together. They straddle the divide between the public and the private, the spectacular and the sacred, entertainment and religion, thereby removing these films from the facile exhibitionism with which the "cinema of attractions" is typically associated. Much like representations of death in the condensed hunt film or the more expansive expedition film, representations of dance contain a refusal, an absence, a void. They represent something that escapes the visible world, something beyond that which appears. A layer of meaning remains unseen and inaccessible.

As with the "hunt" film—singular in its form and focus—the ethnographic dance film offers a kind of visual precursor to what will become of dance in the ethnographic expedition film. Recalling the visual repetitions that structure *The Captain Marshall Field Brazilian Expedition* and even *Chasse à l'hippopotame*, the

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<sup>59</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 150.

dance films of the 1910s string multiple visions of dance together. However, these films are not a natural extension of single-shot filmmaking, with the singular event of dance multiplied endlessly and arbitrarily, nor do they integrate dance into a coherent narrative structure. As best one can decipher, these films are meant to operate as a kind of catalogue, simultaneously documenting different styles of dance, geographic regions, and ethnicities. And yet, these films frequently lack the very elements they would seem to require, namely discernible, whole bodies in motion. For example, one might assume that *Cameroun: Danses dans les régions*, a film made in the early 1910s by the French *Ministère des Colonies*, would betray something of Cameroon, as well as its regional dances. Quite the contrary. The film begins with the fragment of an arm (or a leg), stretched across the screen, followed by another fragment of an arm and a torso (Figure 3.10-3.12). For a brief moment, the bottom half of a body turns, centered in the frame, before the film cuts to an extreme close-up of two shins, a pair of feet, and, finally, knees bobbing gently (Figure 3.13-3.15). From here, the dancing begins in earnest, as a series of shots reveal several groups of individuals dancing. Their bodies and movements are visible, perceptible. Nevertheless, the film frequently returns to the kinds of fragmented visions that frame its introduction. The camera leaves the dancing bodies to inspect the surface of some patch of skin (on whose body? We cannot know) or to pan the length of a figure (whose face one can no longer see). Aside from the film's intertitles, which assign the dances to specific tribes and local geographies, *Cameroun* offers few visual coordinates from which to begin to understand the dances that unfold therein. Moreover, each new geographic region, each new intertitular separation begins this visual cycle of fragmentation anew. Body parts. Dancing bodies. Body parts interspersed among the dancing bodies. The film persistently returns viewers to a handful of questions: What am I looking at? A



Figure 3.10  
*Cameroun: Danses dans les régions*

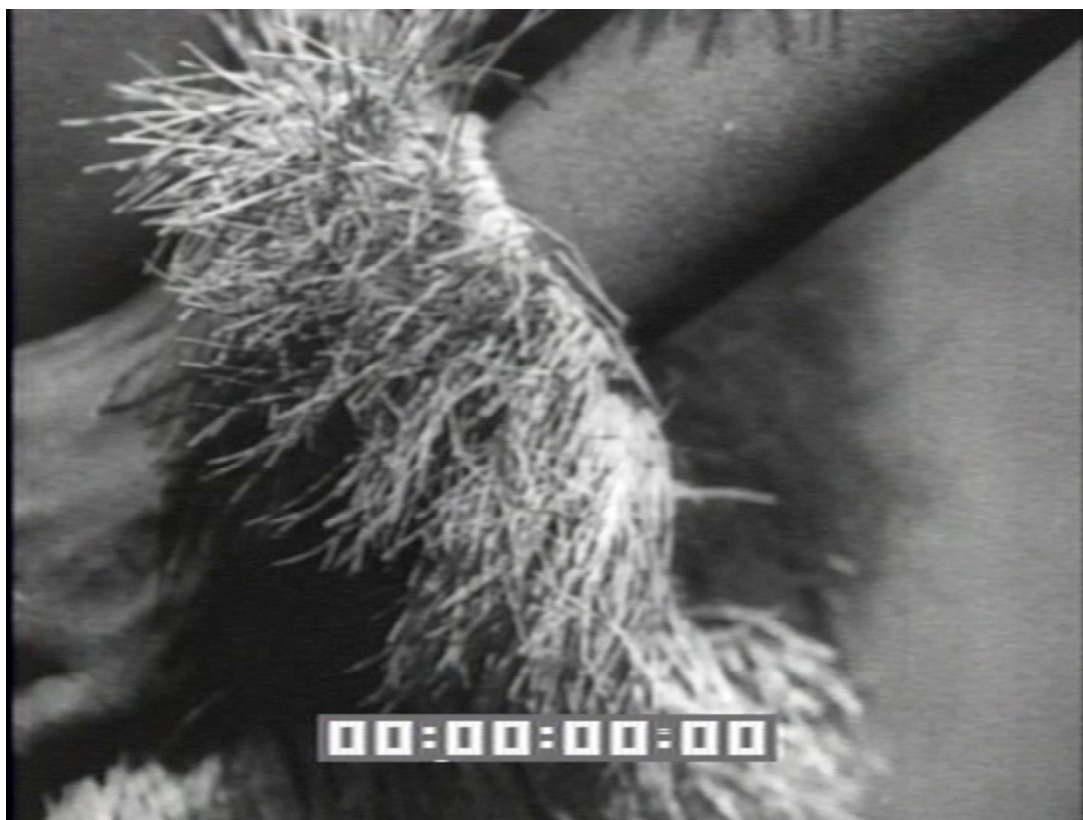


Figure 3.11  
*Cameroun: Danses dans les régions*



Figure 3.12  
*Cameroun: Danses dans les régions*



Figure 3.13  
*Cameroon: Danses dans les régions*





Figure 3.14  
*Cameroun: Danses dans les régions*



Figure 3.15  
*Cameroun: Danses dans les régions*

body? An object? Do these parts belong to the same whole? What is the relationship between these images? What kind of time and place do they communicate?

Like the incessant articulations of death in the hunt film and across early ethnographic cinema, these pre-expedition visions of dance beg a number of questions, particularly in response to the work of Edward Said, Johannes Fabian, and Fatimah Tobing Rony. *Cameroun* seems guided by fantasies of flesh and foreign bodies, bringing its camera into such absurd proximity that the apparatus becomes one of physicality and sensation, of the haptic and the tactile. Though financed by a government agency and made roughly twenty years after Haddon, this is a cinema that, one imagines, would have unsettled museum curators. In her analysis of haptic cinema, Laura Marks draws a helpful line between optical visibility and haptic visibility that is well worth considering alongside these cinematic visions of dance:

Optical visibility depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object. Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze [...] Because a haptic composition appeals to tactile connections on the surface plane of the image, it retains an “objective” character; but an optical image gives up its nature as physical object in order to invite a distant view that allows the viewer to organize him/herself as an all-perceiving subject [...] Haptic images are actually a subset of what Deleuze referred to as optical images: those images that are so “thin” and uncliché that the

viewer must bring his or her resources of memory and imagination to complete them.<sup>60</sup>

Though excluded from the intercultural film memories that Marks examines, *Cameroun* belongs among the many variations of haptic cinema. As spectators, we lose the dance for the body, visual coherence for abstractions of flesh. Notwithstanding a few bare textual cues, the film fails to ground its images of dance upon perceptible geography. *Cameroun* does not construct the kind of separations in space and time that seem to shape ethnographic literature and writing so consistently. The position and proximity of the camera alerts viewers to the materiality of the image and a surplus of presence on both sides of the camera. Like the unassimilable refusal of death-on-screen, this visual surplus of flesh communicates a kind of no-time, albeit of a wholly different order: too much vision and presence, rather than the Ur-event of death and irretrievable absence. Or, a flattened surface of unreadable texture, rather than the endless and impossible depths of a gunshot wound.

The dance film of the 1910s rarely delivers a sequence of uninterrupted, visually coherent dance. The dance instead provides a textural surface, a kind of physical and vibrating visual context upon which fragments of bodies and flesh can appear. The film is made figurative skin so as to examine skin, and hair, and body parts. The body of the dancer becomes a site of close-ups and visual repetitions. Bodies layer upon bodies and the dance becomes an event of physical, bodily intensity. One might likewise consider the dance as a pause, a black frame, and a departure from visual and narrative coherence. It disorients space and time by simply failing to communicate anything about them. With regard to the spatial and temporal categories at work in written ethnographic practice, the dance film neither wholly

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<sup>60</sup> Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000): 162-63.

divides and objectifies its subjects, nor portrays them as autonomous bodies, thinking and living in perceptible space and time. Both forms of signification demand legible signs of space and time. Such clear modes of expression ultimately escape these early representations of dance. *Cameroun* represents neither two worlds, nor a singular and coherent one. Neither schizogenic time, nor co-temporality.

Images of dance saturate expedition ethnography. As a visual event, it punctuates nearly every expedition film, structuring it and contributing yet another curious visual phenomenon to a small collection of ethnographic film conventions. Oftentimes, it seems as though the expedition cannot continue without the visual record of a local dance. Dancing bodies, like deaths, thus appear and dissipate throughout the expedition film, marking it with a kind of incessant visual rhythm. In the expedition film, dance continues to resist coherent spatial and temporal cues, but the complexity of its representation on screen and the ways in which it challenges coherence infinitely expand. Indeed, the materiality of the dance thickens along with the ever-growing material possibilities of film. Though it would be impossible to capture the breadth of representations of dance in expedition filmmaking, a few examples will help to ground my claims and hint at the broader field.

*La Croisière noire* (1927), a remarkably strange and startlingly understudied expedition film directed by Léon Poirier and funded by Citroën—the French automobile manufacturer—traces the adventures of a group of sales managers and self-proclaimed explorers across Sub-Saharan Africa in eight rugged Citroën *autochenilles*.<sup>61</sup> Each stop along their journey guarantees new visions of dance. The

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<sup>61</sup> *La Croisière noire* is the first of a three part series of expedition films funded by Citroën in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Those that followed included *La Croisière jaune* (1932), an expedition across Asia, and *La Croisière blanche* (1934), an expedition across North America. While these films have been largely overlooked in the history of non-fiction film and French film history, they rather interestingly reveal the frequent entanglements in early French non-fiction film between commercial enterprises, government agencies, and film studios, as well as the tendency to wholly bypass the academic institutions of science and ethnology.

film presents surfaces of flesh, extreme close-ups, and indecipherable fragments of bodies and parts. However, *La Croisière noire* layers this haptic space with temporal play. In moments of dance, time slows down and one perceives an altogether different kind of materiality at work: the materiality of film and filmed time. The film does not present “time as an effect,” but time revealed as an effect. Time undone, along with perceptible bodies and space. Dance ignites a similar play with temporality in *Les fils de Cham* (1930), a film directed by Gaston Muraz that offers “a sensational report on the mysterious regions of equatorial Africa,” as well as some “notes and impressions from Dr. Muraz’s voyage.”<sup>62</sup> In the film’s dance sequences, visual fragmentation and spatial proximity combine with fast motion and rapid montage. Again, the materiality of filmed time is put on display as dancers are whipped into a frenzied blur of gestures that move so quickly it becomes difficult to associate the content of the images with anything more than an abstract canvas. The edges of the dance—the scenes that precede and follow it—seem to somehow frame these visual instabilities. For example, the first dance is preceded by the image of a dead woman being covered in palm oil and followed by a close-up of a child’s circumcision. One can read a simple visual logic here: all of these images represent rituals of a sort, but taken together, seen together, dance appears a nucleus of contingencies, which gather at its sides. Finally, in *Le Togo* (1927), a film directed by Pierre Marty and funded by the *Ministère des Colonies*—the same organization that funded *Cameroun*—the event of dance and the body of the dancer serve as sites of spatial, narrative, and temporal dislocation. Though scenes of dance circulate throughout this survey of the French colony, the final dance sequence operates in a decidedly different way. In this concluding moment, the film cuts from an extreme close-up of a dancing torso to a flashback of the film’s visual contents, presented in fast motion and rapid montage. In other words,

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<sup>62</sup> Excerpted from the film’s intertitles.

the film reviews selected sequences from its own expedition, but reshapes them in the process as fast-paced visual fragments. In *Le Togo*, as in *La Croisière noire* and *Les Fils de Cham*, film appears malleable and manipulable. Remarkably, the images that unfold in flashback—the review of the film’s visual contents and narrative events—are inaccurately replayed. The linearity of the expedition film, occasionally disrupted by sequences of dance, ruptures entirely in this moment of return. The film folds back upon itself and loses itself, never returning to the dancing body out of which these images initially emerged. Indeed, the surface of the dancing body breaks open and flashes back, only to reveal another kind of surface, a material world that offers no real understanding of the film’s past images, no narrative direction or signs, and spatial coordinates that can perhaps only be described as virtual.

While these examples represent only a small selection of the many roles that dance plays in early ethnographic expedition cinema, they are not exceptional limit cases, pressing upon the boundaries of the genre. They are *representative* of the genre and constitute its visual code. The expedition itself contributes to the code, to the very definition of an early expedition film. Explorers, scientists, and the occasional sales manager move across maps, through rivers, and across deserts. The expedition film communicates a progressive movement through space and over time (weeks, months, sometimes even years). However, if one considers the journey together with the visual conventions of death and dance, early expedition cinema seems to be an ethnographic genre coded for its own un-coding. One encounters a kind of cinematic death drive. In the shift from the dance film to the expedition film, the dance expands its capacity for spatial and temporal disruption. Rather than a tactile surface and an illegible respite from narrativity or visual coherence, dance becomes a site that draws attention to cinema, to the event of projection underway, and perhaps even to the past act of filming. Moreover, the dance and the fragments of bodies that perform it become sites

of rich temporal and spatial play, as well as narrative doubling and collapse. What should be a simple, linear journey across space and time continually returns to eruptive moments of death and dance, to the very events that ensure its unraveling over and again.

*Supplementing the Supplement: The Structure and Event of Expedition*

While they bring ethnographer and ethnographic subject together in remarkable moments of shared frame and time, early expedition films do not offer the antidote to schizogenic time. They do not “free” cinematic subjects from their formaldehyde-laden textual counterpart and simply register a series of reassuring visions of co-presence and co-temporality. Nor do they recreate the sharp temporal and spatial divisions of written ethnographic practice. I have woven the terms “structure” and “event” throughout this chapter, provocatively and perhaps somewhat irresponsibly, gesturing toward a theoretical heritage that was already overburdened at the time of Derrida’s 1966 lecture, “Structure, Sign, and Play.” I would like to take this heritage—and these terms—a bit more seriously in my concluding comments as Derrida makes an interesting, though inadvertent, case for how one ought to read the expedition film, in particular, and early ethnographic cinema, in general:

The event I called a rupture, the disruption alluded to at the beginning of this paper, would presumably come about when the structurality of the structure had to be thought, that is to say, repeated, and this is why I said that this disruption was repetition in all of the senses of the word. From then on it became necessary to think the law which governed, as it were, the desire for the center in the constitution of structure and the process of signification prescribing its displacements and its substitutions for this law of the central presence—but a central



presence which was never itself, which has always already been transported outside itself in its surrogate.<sup>63</sup>

As I discussed at length in the introduction to this chapter, Derrida grounds this first rupture of structure in the discipline of ethnology, for it “could have been born as a science only at the moment when a decentering had come about: at the moment when European culture—and in consequence, the history of metaphysics and its concepts—had been dislocated, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference.”<sup>64</sup> As a discipline, ethnology takes differences and divides (us and them, Europe and elsewhere) as first and essential conditions for scientific investigation. It recognizes an autonomous self and moves outside of it, beyond the center and the boundaries of the self-structure. Derrida defines this process of decentering in spatial terms. He describes a movement away from the physical center of a structure and an act of dislocation and relocation that can be traced in space. The event of decentered thought, of thinking the structure as such, cannot be limited to a handful of eruptive moments in the history of metaphysical reconsiderations (e.g. French ethnology, Nietzschean metaphysics, Freudian psychoanalysis). One must sift through the theoretical resonances, as well as the literal implications of Derrida’s spatially inflected lexicon. A structure can be a sign, a taxonomic category, a discipline, or a geographic location. Understood as such, the movement outside of it, beyond it, can equally denote a shift in signification, knowledge production, and/or spatial position. French ethnology of the 1950s and 1960s owes its primacy, in the work of Derrida, to its unique conflation of these structural categories (discourse, discipline, and geography). Ethnology is not alone, however, in this process of simultaneous structural displacements. It belongs among the many modes of

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<sup>63</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1980): 280.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

ethnographic practice that leave the armchair for the field in the twentieth century in an effort to represent the categories of difference they presumed to be true. In many cases, the film camera went along to record these decentered movements in space and across time.

As Derrida describes it, the event disrupts the stability of organizing structures, be they taxonomic categories or national boundaries. The event marks a movement away from structures, away from a belief in structures, toward an unpredictable and destabilizing play of differences. The abandonment of structure opens onto the possibilities of what Derrida terms *bricolage*, reading against the grain of Levi-Strauss's terminological distinctions (i.e. bricoleur versus engineer). One leaves the firm ground of discourse and disciplines, abandoning "all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *arche*."<sup>65</sup> In its place, one takes what is at hand, what one encounters, what one sees. One simply makes do. Doane aligns this mix of any-instant-whatever with both the methodologies and temporality of early cinema.<sup>66</sup> Like *bricolage*, early cinema cannot control itself or engineer its form. It welcomes the contingent, the disruptive, the event. It takes what it can get and projects it all on screen. In the narrative turn, Doane argues, early cinema abandons visual *bricolage* for stable narrative centers. However, in the case of early ethnographic cinema, the event paradoxically organizes the image. The ethnographic expedition film takes the event of geographic departure as its visual and narrative starting point, gathering any-image-whatever-of-difference along the way. In its searches for the decentering events beyond the structural boundaries of the familiar self or European center, the expedition film moves between the event and the structure, contingency and control. It plays with time and space, never entirely

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>66</sup> Doane, *Cinematic Time*, 165-166.

abandoning this dizzying series of decenterings, even in its post-war manifestations. For ethnographic film production, the development of sophisticated narrative techniques does not calm the visual content, its temporal and spatial flux. It simply allows for more death, dances, and unexpected visual events to gather on screen.

All forms of ethnographic practice—be they written or visual—emerge out of a necessary and initial movement away from the structure, its center, and what Derrida describes as a “constant of a presence—*eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia* [truth], transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, so forth.”<sup>67</sup> Ethnographic forms of representation cannot deliver truth, true forms, or an enduring presence. Text upon text, image upon image, ethnography tries to represent that which is always and already absented from the center: the actual ethnographic subject. In the impossibility of totalizing representation and the potentially endless cycle of representation, Derrida perceives a process of supplementarity and an invigorating field of freeplay:

There is too much, more than one can say. But nontotalization can also be determined in another way: not from the standpoint of the concept of finitude as assigning us to an empirical view, but from the standpoint of *freeplay*. If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infinity of the field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in fact that of *freeplay*, that is to say a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble [...] One could say—rigorously using the word whose scandalous signification is always obliterated in French—that this

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<sup>67</sup> Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” *Writing and Difference*, 280.

movement of the freeplay, permitted by the lack, the absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*.

We have, of course, encountered the term “supplement” before. Karl Heider employs it to demote ethnographic cinema to a kind of second-order ethnographic practice and to divert critical attention away from its forms. But what if one were to use ethnographic cinema’s supplementarity as a critical tool for understanding it? The concepts of supplementarity and freeplay, joined in their own relationship of interchangeability, offer useful model(s) for thinking about early ethnographic cinema and its movements between spatial stability and instability, temporal presence and absence. Indeed, ethnographic cinema transmits visual simultaneity and geographic specificity. However, a unique field of freeplay, and the unexpected events that unfold therein, decenter these temporal and spatial presences. Early ethnographic cinema is inscribed within a two-fold, or two-fielded process of supplementarity and free-play. It supplements the bodies and landscapes it aims to represent. At the same time, it supplements the first-order of ethnographic practice: ethnographic writing. In its status as a supplement, or as a practice of secondary and often vaguely defined utility, early ethnographic cinema welcomes the unexpected and the contingent in a way that its written complement never can. Rather than dismissing early ethnographic cinema on the basis of its second-order importance, one might begin to take its status as a supplement seriously. Perhaps we can find in it something of that secondary interpretation of interpretation that Derrida sketches at the end of his lecture. A seminal adventure. Absolute chance. The “other” interpretation, which is not turned toward the origin, but toward the affirmation of contingency and play.

4  
NATIVE AND NARRATION:  
MIXED RACE AND HYBRID FORM

This chapter is an experiment of sorts, a collision of texts and ideas whose multilayered approach is perhaps matched only by the unusual films it aims to understand. In Chapter Three, I brought the concept of “taxidermic ethnography” into contact with the expansive terrain of ethnographic expedition films. This non-fiction mode of ethnographic cinema, I argue, lacks the coherent spatial and temporal cues that define the taxidermic visual regime, as well as written ethnographic practice. In this chapter, I would like to consider the collision that unfolds in the 1920s between non-fiction ethnographic filmmaking and popular narrative cinema. One could argue that *Nanook of the North* (1922)—the model of taxidermic filmmaking for Fatimah Tobing Rony—is the first product of this collision.<sup>1</sup> Though many consider Robert Flaherty’s depiction of Inuit existence in the Arctic to be one of the first documentary films ever made, Flaherty shaped his materials into a tightly controlled fiction about a family’s struggle. The film uncannily resembles the tales of morality and domestic life that dominated the screen fictions of silent cinema in the United States and Europe. In this chapter, I will not return to *Nanook*, or the small cohort of ethnographic filmmakers that followed in Flaherty’s wake, inserting native bodies into preconceived tales of adventure and romance, all the while making claims to authenticity that seemed to rest upon the sheer presence of “other” flesh. An enormous bounty of critical literature exists for those who are intrigued by that confounding path through the history of non-fiction filmmaking.<sup>2</sup> Instead, I will focus

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<sup>1</sup> See Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 99-126.

<sup>2</sup> For those interested in biographical accounts of Flaherty, see Robert Joseph Flaherty and Frances Hubbard Flaherty, *Robert and Frances Flaherty: A Documentary Life, 1883-1922* (McGill: Queen’s University Press, 2005) and Arthur Calder-Marshall, *The Innocent Eye: The Life of Robert Flaherty* (New York: Penguin, 1970); for key essays on Flaherty’s contribution to the history of documentary filmmaking, see Erik Barnouw, “Explorer,” *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film* (New York:

on fiction films from the second half of the 1920s that, I believe, more aptly embody the subtle, indirect, and intriguing ways that the forms and contents of early ethnographic cinema influence a vast terrain of fictional entertainment films.

Two films will constitute the nucleus of this analysis. The first, *La Sirène des tropiques* (1927), stars Josephine Baker as Papitou, a Caribbean native who finds fame and romance in Paris. The second, *Yasmina* (1926), tells the story of a Tunisian princess—played by a little-known actress named Huguette Duflos—rescued by a dashing French doctor from her harem and husband. Like so many ethnographic films, *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina* indulge in a spectacular surface of racial and sexual difference, as well as a discourse of spatialized time that positions European bodies further along the axis of evolutionary development. However, this ideological framework does not translate seamlessly and consistently on-screen. Rather than a wholly immersive and coherent experience of colonial and ethno-centric fantasy, these films manifest visual disruptions and narrative dislocations, not entirely unlike those that inhabit the ethnographic expedition film. One could read these distracting instabilities as signs of a nascent and not-yet-fully-formed narrative cinema, or as reflections of an unstable visual landscape that, for Georg Simmel, included “the rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli.”<sup>3</sup> While both are valuable avenues of analysis and interpretation, these films equally bear the trace of an awkward collision between non-fiction and fiction, expedition and entertainment. And while both *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina* were directed by

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Oxford University Press, 1974): 33-49; John Grierson, “Flaherty,” *Cinema Quarterly* 3 (1934): 12-17; William Rothman, “The Filmmaker as Hunter: Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*,” *Documenting the Documentary*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998): 23-39; Jay Ruby, “A Reexamination of the Early Career of Robert J. Flaherty,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1980): 431-457.

<sup>3</sup> Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950 [1903]): 410.

feature-length film directors—Henri Étievant and André Hugon, respectively—rather than scientists and explorers, and were produced by mainstream film studios, they likewise seem to share in a mode of early filmmaking whose standard practices paradoxically defied standardization.

*La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina* overlap in a number of important ways. Although neither film makes a claim to documentary authenticity, nor would they have been considered for exhibition at the natural history museum, both films weave extensive footage of native bodies and geographies together with narratives of romance and adventure. These films wander, often aimlessly and indiscriminately, between here and elsewhere, non-fiction and fiction, the natural landscape and extravagant fictionalized interiors. Loose ends, complicated remainders, and inexplicable visual detours abound. Upon cursory inspection, the narrative of *La Sirène des tropiques* offers little more than a colonial fantasy. A native of the Antilles, Papitou communes with tropical animals, occasionally takes her clothes off, and eventually sets sail for the metropole to pursue a love that can only ever be unrequited and to join, as the film describes it, “the race for happiness.” However, the film rapidly shuttles between France and the West Indies, between the domestic space of the French bourgeoisie and the tropical milieu of Papitou’s animal-human family, and between the filmic and the profilmic. Moreover, as with all of Baker’s films, *La Sirène des Tropiques* attempts to showcase stereotypes of African dance and make visible the American and Jazz-influenced music hall performances for which Baker had become famous. These narrative movements and combinations contribute to a dizzying “doing” and “undoing” of the narrative space and its principal character.

Apart from the complex network of associations that Baker’s stardom produces, *Yasmina* oscillates between similar spaces and stories. While publicity for the film firmly grounds spectators in the forbidden interiors of the harem, guaranteeing

“all the magic of the Orient, all the lascivious fantasy of the harem, all of the voluptuous lyricism of its cloisters,” the film frequently and unexpectedly departs from the harem and the very particular narrative that unfolds therein to languorously consume the landscape of Tunisia.<sup>4</sup> Recalling the interminable pans of the Kahn archive and the expedition film, which I discuss in Chapters Two and Three, *Yasmina* devotes enormous stretches of its three hours’ duration to the patient documentation of a landscape that seems to bear no necessary relationship to the narrative action. The film simply takes lengthy pauses to look outside. Moreover, *Yasmina* shifts between Tunisia and France, past and present, taking so many narrative turns that plot summary presents a sincere challenge. Haideh Moghissi describes the film as one of many standard scenarios that depicts, “the intrepid French hero who penetrated the harem to ‘rescue’ a beautiful captive European or Arab princess from the lascivious clutches of a cruel sheik.”<sup>5</sup> However, Moghissi fails to mention that the man who rescues Yasmina from her husband is her brother/lover and that, before being rescued, she commits suicide and is brought back to life through a Frankenstein-esque complete blood transfusion. In some sense, Moghissi is right. The scenario is standard. But the standard is absolute excess. Both *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina* are films of excessive visual and narrative instabilities (and, in the case of *Yasmina*, excessive duration).

This chapter will explore yet another important and complicated point of contact between *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina*. The central protagonists of both films—Papitou and Yasmina—are mixed-race women, romantically entangled with white leading men. Papitou is the daughter of a French colonialist and an (always absent) Antillean mother, while Yasmina is the daughter of an Algerian father

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<sup>4</sup> Haideh Moghissi, *Women and Islam: Images and Realities* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 150.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



and a (deceased) French mother. In his study of the racial grammar of American cinema, Donald Bogle identifies the category of the “tragic mulatto.” This figure is “made likeable—even sympathetic (because of her white blood, no doubt),” and the audience believes that her “life could have been productive and happy had she not been a ‘victim of divided racial inheritance’.”<sup>6</sup> To this definition, Stuart Hall adds that American cinema typically represents the “tragic mulatto” as “beautiful, sexually attractive, and often exotic, the prototype of the smoldering, sexy heroine, whose partly white blood makes her ‘acceptable,’ even attractive, to white men, but whose indelible ‘stain’ of black blood condemns her to a tragic conclusion.”<sup>7</sup> While the American “mulatto,” with its very particular locus in the history of American slavery and racial anxiety, does not neatly map onto the mixed-race woman of 1920s French cinema—often termed a *métisse*—Bogle and Stuart provide helpful initial articulations of the fears and fantasies that intersect upon the body of the mixed-race woman, no matter her historical or political context.<sup>8</sup> Like the “tragic mulatto,” both Papitou and Yasmina operate as sites and signs of sexual desire. As Jane Gaines observes, “To the sexual explorer, the body of the racial other represents uncharted territory, and, not surprisingly, the myth of the ‘primitive’ is in operation as it promises in proportion to the darkness of the body.”<sup>9</sup> *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina* invite spectators to indulge in fantasies of exploration, offering mixed-race bodies as guides and rewarding spatial trespass—of the tropical jungle or the forbidden female sanctuary of

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<sup>6</sup> Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 1973): 9.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the Other,” *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997): 251.

<sup>8</sup> The term “métis” originally referred to the mixed-race descendants of French fur-traders or soldiers, and members of the Cree, Ojibwa, Saulteaux, or Menominee aboriginal people of Manitoba. During the second French colonial empire, the term expanded to include the descendants of mixed or “impure” French parentage. See Philip Herbst, *The Color of Words* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 1997): 145.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Gaines, *Fire and Desire: Mixed Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001): 88.

the harem—with images of naked, supine bodies. While the mixed-race woman may register as somehow less primitive or tantalizingly uncharted, her divided parentage eases the transgressive quality of spectatorial complicity. After all, Papitou and Yasmina are half French, a term whose synonyms in these cinematic contexts include white, colonial, civilized, mature, and powerful. The division nevertheless cuts both ways. As a “mixed” body, the *métisse* is a diluted body. It bears the physical trace of a past racial transgression and embodies the corruption of racial, national, and cultural purity. While the “original” transgression cannot be repeated, and its inscription upon the body of mixed-race offspring incites the fantasy of future transgressions, it likewise cannot be undone. Though partially French, Papitou and Yasmina are equally not French and not white. Taken together, they are ambiguous and problematic figures. They vacillate between self and other, incite both fantasies and fears, and belong to no identity or category in particular. They are the inviting and threatening in-between.

Though a figure of fictional filmmaking, the *métisse* is firmly rooted in the cultural and political landscape of turn-of-the-century France. Returning to Gaines, she insightfully argues that, “the historical asserts itself in every interracial sexual encounter. Every act is a reenactment.”<sup>10</sup> Gaines seemingly calls attention to the indexicality of the mixed-race body, as I have. At the same time, she interestingly underscores the broader history of interracial encounters that necessarily precede their visual, fictional representation. In other words, white bodies and identities circulate among and through those of other races long before this visual and narrative phenomenon arrives on screen. In a film like *What Happened in the Tunnel* (Porter, 1903), one uncovers the reenactment of humiliation and sexual surrogacy on the American plantation, as well as a widespread anxiety about racial confusion,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 89.

substitution, and indeterminacy. Beneath its comic veneer, *What Happened in the Tunnel* indexes real events and conflicts. In much the same way, *La Sirène des Tropiques* and *Yasmina* recall decades of travel, colonialism, collapsed geographic boundaries, and unexpected intercultural encounters. In addition to a collision of genres and film histories (namely ethnographic documentary and narrative fiction), these films represent the bodily collisions and intrusions wrought by centuries of expedition, colonialism, and ethnography.

One cannot help but draw yet another comparison with the expedition film and its subtle undoing of the natural history museum and the taxidermic mode of ethnographic cinema. The expedition film takes viewers behind-the-scenes of the life exhibits and foregrounds the violent underbelly of the taxidermic surface; the ethno-fiction film foregrounds the sexual encounters of ethnographic and colonial travel, dismantling the visual refusals and abstract surfaces of the expedition film in a less violent, but no less efficient fashion. Put another way, the mixed-race protagonist reinscribes the expedition with sex. Ethno-fiction suggests that the expedition film's haptic images of texture and tactility are signs of literal, off-screen touch.

Alongside these considerations of spectatorial desire, ideological influence, and historical inscription, this chapter will interrogate the *métisse* as a narrative convention in ethno-fiction film. The hesitant fantasies and confrontations with history that both Papitou and Yasmina inspire hint at the essential instability of the mixed-race protagonist. Neither self nor other, but both and neither. Neither here nor elsewhere, but everywhere and nowhere at once. Where do Papitou and Yasmina belong? Where can one position them on a map, an evolutionary ladder, or a taxonomy of racial types? What can we call them? French? Caribbean? Algerian? Their collage of national identities demands a hyphen, a combination, a new sign. They challenge the very categories of identity and geography upon which colonial and

ethnographic discourses depend, producing a fascinating visual complement to Homi Bhabha's theorization of ambivalence. Like the colonial subject, the *métisse* occupies two places at once. Bhabha argues that this space of exclusion can become a powerful site of potential subversion. He writes, "The depersonalized, dislocated colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place. The demand of authority cannot unify its message nor simplify its subjects. For the strategy of colonial desire is to stage the drama of identity at the point in which the black man *slips* to reveal the white skin. At the edge, in-between the black body and the white body, there is a tension of meaning and being, or some would say demand and desire."<sup>11</sup> Although here Bhabha emphasizes the black male subject in regimes of colonial desire, overlooking the very particular role of the female body, he nevertheless confirms the central and perplexing opposition of the ethno-fiction film. Insofar as it demands sameness and familiarity, the strategy of colonial desire that shapes these films and positions the *métisse* as narrative guide, equally ensures difference and a destabilization of meaning. Gaines makes a similar claim with regard to the mulatto in American race cinema: "One could assert the subversive potential of the existence of the mulatto, asserting 'race' characteristics not as givens, but as shifting and malleable [...] It would seem that the idea of a fixed and hereditary group is nullified with every change."<sup>12</sup> But how exactly do these "tensions of meaning" inflect the ethno-fiction film? How do the ambivalent identities of mixed-race protagonists like Papitou and Yasmina shape the visual and narrative contours of these films? And what kind of deconstructive or subversive possibilities do they catalyze? While a "divided racial inheritance" may guarantee an unproductive or tragic life for Papitou and Yasmina, in this chapter I will explore the many ways in which it seems

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<sup>11</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994): 89.

<sup>12</sup> Gaines, *Fire and Desire*, 208.

to equally guarantee an unproductive narrative, a meaningless film, and an “imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledge and disciplinary powers.”<sup>13</sup>

Before shifting to a discussion of Josephine Baker and *La Sirène des tropiques*, I would like to offer a final note regarding my theoretical framework. At several points in this chapter, I turn to the work of Gilles Deleuze, to both the epistemological claims he makes in *Logique du sens* and his study of cinema, developed across *L’Image-mouvement* and *L’Image-temps*.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, the relation between Deleuze, ethnography, and the obscure images at hand is anything but clear. He never addresses the films (or icon) of Josephine Baker and, had he done so, they might very well have been relegated to the first volume of his cinema series and its discussions of classical cinema, rather than the dislocations and displacements of the modern *image-temps*. However, Deleuze contributes an important critical and explicatory voice. His notion of the *image-temps* uniquely addresses the narrative gaps and refusals, the variety of generic forms present in the ethno-fiction film, and, perhaps most importantly, the instability of the central protagonist. Indeed, he is one of the few film theorists who meditates on the protagonist at length, reformulating it as a body, a narrative device, and an abstract structure. At the same time, ethno-fiction and *image-temps* do not lend themselves to a happy union. My reading of Deleuze alongside ethno-fiction cinema implicitly critiques the historical division that Deleuze draws between movement and time, the *image-mouvement* and the *image-temps*. In positing World War II as *the* determining twentieth-century event, Deleuze necessarily effaces other forms of historical violence, including the centuries of exploration, colonialism,

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<sup>13</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 123.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986); Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989).

and invasive ethnography, which so directly inform *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina*.

*“I’m Josephine Baker, That’s All”: Transatlantic Migration and Infinite Identity*

The manifold quality of Josephine Baker’s body and performance not only precedes her appearances on screen, but determines them. In order to both contextualize *La Sirène des tropiques* and trace Baker’s unusual cinematic migration from the American south, to the Antilles, to the Parisian music hall, one must first consider the collection of names, signs, and discourses with which Baker was frequently associated in the 1920s. In 1925, French dance critic and theorist André Levinson attended one of Baker’s performances in *La Revue Nègre*. His description delivers a chaotic mixture of images and associations that are as difficult to decipher, it would seem, as the body of Josephine Baker:

In the short *pas de deux* of the savages, which came as the finale of the *Revue Nègre*, there was a wild splendor and magnificent animality. Certain of Miss Baker’s poses, back-arched, haunches protruding, arms entwined and uplifted in a phallic symbol, had the compelling potency of the finest examples of Negro sculpture. The plastic sense of a race of sculptors came to life and the frenzy of African Eros swept over the audience. It was no longer a grotesque dancing girl that stood before them, but the black Venus that haunted Baudelaire.<sup>15</sup>

In Levinson’s brief summation of the finale, the artifice of stage and theatre collapse. Dancers become mere “savages,” transmitting the essence of race and place. For Levinson, Baker appears a patchwork of limbs in motion. Her writhing body confirms

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<sup>15</sup> André Levinson, *André Levinson on Dance: Writings from Paris in the Twenties*, eds. Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1991): 74; originally published in *Theatre Arts Monthly* (April 1927).

what he has heard. These African women are at once animal and human, child and adult, male and female. Beautiful to look at, but incredibly dangerous to touch. Baker's body, considered in sum, becomes a magnificent black phallus, a statue representative of an entire artistic tradition, and a myth. Still tingling from the frenzy of this African Eros, Levinson loses himself and his readers in a great mélange of literary and cultural tropes. Baker moves from dancing girl to stiff phallus, from lifeless sculpture to sculpture come (back) to life. In his final assessment, Levinson removes Baker from the "potency" and purity of Africa and its artistic traditions. She becomes the "black Venus" and Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire's mixed-race lover of twenty years.

e.e. cummings's experience of *La Revue Nègre* similarly dismembers Baker's body and effaces the distinction between the Parisian theater and the African jungle. Though he describes Baker as a pure sign of sensation, a kinetic display that unfolds beyond or outside of time, cummings, like Levinson, ultimately reaffirms her hybridity. Baker presents an impossible combination of metaphysical identities that nevertheless seem to allow cummings (and Levinson) to muse about "real" African spaces and bodies. He writes:

She enters through a dense electric twilight, walking backwards on hands and feet, legs and arms stiff, down a huge jungle tree—as a creature neither infrahuman nor superhuman but somehow both: a mysterious unkillable Something, equally nonprimitive and uncivilized, or beyond time in the sense that emotion is beyond arithmetic.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> I first encountered this description of Josephine Baker in Bryan Hammond and Patrick O'Connor's, *Josephine Baker* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1988): 41. In their essay, "Josephine Baker and Paul Colin: African Dance Seen Through Parisian Eyes," Karen C.C. Dalton and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. also mention cummings's response. See *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 4 (1998): 911. The essay in which these remarks originally appeared, "Vive la Folie!" can be found in *e.e. cummings: A Miscellany* (New York: October House, 1965): 159-163.

Neither inhuman beast, nor superhuman spirit. Rather than admit the possibility that Baker is quite simply human, cummings formulates an impossible union of two already impossible identities. This awkward calculation (not inhuman + not superhuman = infra-super-human, equal parts uncivilized and nonprimitive) seems only to double the prohibition. As infra-super-human, Baker remains radically other and off-limits, a hybrid of beast and goddess. And what of Baker's status as an "unkillable Something"? What does it mean to be unkillable? The unkillable being might be an object of pity (as bestowed upon a degenerate breed) or beyond the realm of beings (or Being) altogether and, therefore, beyond the realm of killing and death. The hybridity that cummings assigns to Baker bridges these options nicely. However, this cannot be the limit of its function in the text and its resonance with readers. The very word—unkillable—bursts forth, startlingly out of place within the language of performance and play. Despite cummings's assurances of an un-killable quality, an un-killable Baker, he simultaneously articulates a desire frustrated, a desire to lunge, touch, grab, choke, kill, discard, or perhaps sublimate and suppress. A desire somehow un-done. Baker escapes. She returns to the stage and cummings's nightmares (or fantasies) over and again. cummings does not really know what to call her, or how to call her, and it is precisely this unnamable "Somethingness" that allows for Baker's slippage back to the stage, into the jungle, and onto the streets of Paris.

As Levinson and cummings's writings begin to suggest, Josephine Baker confounded the imaginations of her spectators. She performed stereotypes of African identity and slid easily into the reductive discourses of French colonialism. At the same time, she was an African-American from Missouri, performing on one of the most famous stages of Paris. Baker's career began in 1919 with the Theatre Owners' Booking Association vaudeville circuit in the United States. She toured for several months with The Jones Family Band as a dancer and comedic attraction and then



earned a minor part in The Dixie Steppers' traveling show.<sup>17</sup> In 1921, she joined the chorus line of Sissle and Blake's *Shuffle Along*, the first Broadway musical that was written, produced, and performed by African-Americans. Baker drew crowds as the comedic chorus girl who crossed her eyes and warped her limbs.<sup>18</sup> Sissle and Blake opened their next show, *In Bamville*, also known as *The Chocolate Dandies*, with Baker cast in the comedic role of Topsy Anna, "a ragamuffin in blackface wearing bright cotton smocks and clown shoes."<sup>19</sup> The show opened on the heels of Elisabeth Welch's performance in *Runnin' Wild*, which introduced white, middle-class American audiences to the Charleston. Though Baker inherited the dance phenomenon, her rendition mingled with the comedic gestures that she had developed in earlier roles. Baker was frequently described as unlike any other female performer on-stage, anywhere in the world.<sup>20</sup>

In 1925, Baker brought the Charleston to Paris, where a fascination with African-American music and dance, as well as with the milieu of the southern plantation had been well underway since the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, if not earlier.<sup>21</sup> Baker played the lead role in *La Revue Nègre*, a show organized for the

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<sup>17</sup> Hammond and O'Connor, *Josephine Baker*, 4-5. As Hammond and O'Connor point out, the Theater Owner's Booking Association (T.O.B.A.) served as a booking agency for African-American vaudeville performers. Known by its performers as "Tough On Black Artists/Asses," T.O.B.A. provided access to "black" theaters in the United States. T.O.B.A. notoriously paid less than the booking agencies with access to the venues serving white audiences.

<sup>18</sup> Hammond and O'Conner, *Josephine Baker*, 8-10. The mad rhythms of Baker's performances might be interestingly tied to a broader social phenomenon articulated by Rae Beth Gordon. Gordon describes an exchange of discourses and images related to psychopathology, hysteria, and epilepsy between medical institutions and spaces of mass entertainment in turn-of-the-century France. See Gordon, "From Charcot to Charlot: Unconscious Imitation and Spectatorship in French Cabaret and Early Cinema," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 515-549.

<sup>19</sup> Dalton and Gates, "Baker and Colin," *Critical Inquiry*, 911.

<sup>20</sup> Details of Baker's biography, including her rise to fame on the American vaudeville stage, have been well documented. In addition to works previously cited, see Jean-Claude Baker and Chris Chase, *Josephine: The Hungry Heart* (New York: Random House, 1993); Josephine Baker and Jo Bouillon, *Josephine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Lynn Haney, *Naked at the Feast: A Biography of Josephine Baker* (New York: Robson Books, 1996); Phyllis Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> I would like to underscore a few significant historical moments here. At the *Exposition Universelle* in 1900, John Philip Sousa conducted an orchestral performance that included several Ragtime

*Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* by wealthy Chicago socialite Caroline Dudley Reagan. Reagan wanted Parisians to experience “authentic” African-American music and dance. However, the geographic and cultural shifts—from New York to Paris, from the American traditions of vaudeville and minstrelsy to the dance halls of Paris—required significant changes be made to the structure and content of Reagan’s African-American spectacle.<sup>22</sup> The show eliminated the racial gags and “types” that guided American vaudeville, as well as the tap-dancing and spirituals. Spectators wanted less America and more Africa. Or, to put it more plainly, spectators wanted more Americans *performing* Africa, a socio-historical detail to which I will soon return.<sup>23</sup> In its French incarnation, *La Revue Nègre* focused spectators’ attention on Baker, her dances, and the (frequently) nude body that performed them. Against the drumming of an unidentifiable or nonexistent African tribe, Baker became a savage, a playful

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compositions by African-American musician and composer Scott Joplin. The Cake Walk, a dance performed by Southern slaves for their slaveholders, arrived in Paris around 1902/1903 with a performance at the *Nouveaux Cirque* of *Les Joyeux Nègres*. Also at the 1900 *Exposition*, W.E.B. Du Bois presented his exhibition of the “American Negro.” For a discussion of these transatlantic migrations, see Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900-1930* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003): 15-36; W.E.B. Du Bois, “The American Negro at Paris,” *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* 22, no. 5 (November 1900): 575-577.

<sup>22</sup> During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the music hall tradition in Paris bore a striking resemblance to vaudeville in the United States. Both forms of entertainment began by gathering variety entertainment under a stable collection of venues in the countries’ urban centers. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, both developed luxury theaters that courted the middle class and both encouraged the parallel development of small, specialized theaters that catered to particular ethnic groups or local populations. However, American vaudeville owed much to the tradition of minstrelsy and showcases of all manner of ethnic stereotype. In the United States, Baker played to mostly black audiences on the T.O.B.A. circuit (see n. 8), until her Broadway success in *Shuffle Along* and *In Bamville*. Her roles were limited to comedic minstrelsy and blackface. In Paris, Baker opened in the luxurious *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* and performed for largely white, European audiences. As suggested by the revisions of *La Revue Nègre*, the denigration of African-Americans and immigrant communities in American vaudeville was supplanted in French music hall by a demand for colonial bodies and geographies. For histories and analyses of American vaudeville and French music hall, see Rae Beth Gordon, *Why The French Love Jerry Lewis: From Cabaret to Early Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985); Charles W. Stein, *American Vaudeville as Seen by its Contemporaries* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> Dalton and Gates, “Baker and Colin,” *Critical Inquiry*, 911-13.

monkey, and an erotic mystery. Though her “African” movements included those that she had developed as the comedic chorus line girl in the United States, as well as modified versions of the Charleston—itsself, a modification of West-African dance that developed in the American South—no one seemed to note their American provenance or mind the mixed origins of the revue. Over the course of the next decade, Baker sang in birdcages, danced between jungle trees, willingly articulated the reductive vocabulary of colonial fear and fantasy, and quickly became one of the highest-paid and often-emulated icons of French performance.

The simultaneity of signs inscribed upon and by the body, performance, and persona of Baker made her, as Bhabha might suggest, “quite literally difficult to place.” In 1928, Baker responded thusly to a string of questions about race relations in the United States, her reception in Europe, and plans for the future: “I am not a machine; neither am I a dancer, or a comedienne, I am not even black. I am Josephine Baker, that’s all.”<sup>24</sup> The first, and most enigmatic of Baker’s refusals—“I am not a machine”—gestures toward the prevalent discourses that cast her as otherworldly, superhuman, or animal. It also acknowledges both the performative repetitions upon which her fame depended (e.g. the *danse sauvage*, the banana skirt, etc.) and the technological ones that disseminated her name and image throughout the world. Baker’s statement rejects the general categories upon which her public persona was constructed and recuperates the divisions between public and private, performative and individual *human* identity. Nevertheless, her statement affords an alternative reading that paradoxically resurrects the very identities she aims to deny. The assertion, “I am Josephine Baker, that’s all” can be read as a refusal of the public’s claim to knowledge. The proper name, *Josephine Baker*, certainly signifies an

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Charlene Regester, “The Construction of an Image and the Deconstruction of a Star: Josephine Baker Racialized, Sexualized, and Politicized in the African-American Press, the Mainstream Press, and FBI files,” *Popular Music and Society* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 50.

autonomous and sovereign self. However, it likewise betrays an enormous instability precisely because Baker attained (and retains) iconic status as a black dancer and comedienne, with her name and routines repeated incessantly, mechanically in the public domain. Lexically and semantically, the claim then echoes those of both Levinson and Cummings. Baker defines herself in the negative (not a machine, not a dancer, etc.) and affirms her identity with the very name that carries with it not only machine, dancer, comedienne, and black, but also the swirling and often contradictory geographical, colonial, and cultural designations that typify Levinson's labyrinthine wanderings and Cummings's confusing arithmetic.

Deleuze's understanding of simulacrum, unlimited becoming, and *sense* already begin to reveal themselves in the ambiguity of Baker's proper name and the incoherence of her critics' descriptions. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze disavows the platonic division between model and copy, the unity of things beneath a concept or Idea. Instead, he claims, there are bodies. A body can be a human form, as well as a gesture, tension, or action. The Being of a body depends upon the coming together or mixture of bodies, a mixture that produces incorporeal effects at the surface of the body or bodies. One cannot touch these effects or trace their emergence back to any one origin. One can only *sense* their play at the surface. As Deleuze defines them, these effects, these simulacra refuse good *sense*, common *sense*, and the hermetic union of the Platonic Idea.<sup>25</sup> They can only produce forces, movements, or *sensations*. This abstract paradigm finds a more concrete articulation in Deleuze's analysis of the proper name in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. As Deleuze explains, the surface effects that constitute the event or pure becoming present a paradox. They move in two directions at once, backward into a limitless past and forward into an unforeseeable future. "The paradox of this pure becoming, with its capacity to elude

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<sup>25</sup> See Deleuze, "The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy," *Logic of Sense*, 253-79.

the present, is the paradox of infinite identity (the infinite identity of both directions or sense at the same time—of future and past, of the day before and the day after, of more and less, of too much and not enough, of active and passive, and of cause and effect.)”<sup>26</sup> The proper name tries to stabilize or fix identity. But Alice just can’t stop becoming. Her double movement, her continual becoming (bigger, smaller, etc.), results in a loss of identity, stability, and the proper name. She becomes play at the surface: pure simulacra or *infinite identity*.

Like Alice, Baker becomes a malleable, flexible, mobile sign. She is a play of movements and a collection of discourses. Indeed, at least two trajectories or lines of discourse intersect upon the figure of Josephine Baker, pulling her in several, non-binary directions at once. She was both a *vedette* (or star) of French popular culture and a black woman from the United States.<sup>27</sup> In the case of the former category, her image expanded beyond the body or the physical sign, circulating in photographs, postcards, posters, and advertisements. Baker sold tickets to her performances, as well as style magazines, hair cream, dolls, and toothpaste.<sup>28</sup> She was both a commodity and a commercial. In the case of the latter category, Baker was always and already a sign of racial division and mixture. From the perspective of many French spectators,

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<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Baker’s stardom remains a little-explored field of inquiry. In *Stars*, Richard Dyer explains that “the roles and/or performance of a star in a film were taken as revealing the personality of the star (which then was corroborated by the stories in the magazines, etc.),” (20) and that “the plot of the film may matter less than the ‘personality’ that the film as a whole reveals—the star phenomenon emphasizes the kind of person the star is rather than the specific circumstances of particular roles,” (57). For Dyer, cinematic performances are the central contribution to an intertextual and multimedia construction that holds the carrot of truth or true identity before the eyes of eager spectators. Baker’s cinematic appearances seem strangely at odds with this reading of stardom. Her films actively refuse to contribute to any understanding of Baker’s personality. Indeed, they are exempt from the materials that collaborate in the construction of her stardom. In “Embodied Fictions and Melancholy Migrations: Josephine Baker’s Cinematic Celebrity,” Terri Francis excavates the ways in which Baker’s cinematic performances present a “crisis of representation” and fail to offer a “coherent public or private, collective or individual identity,” (828). In this vein, I would argue that Baker is part of a little-explored category of screen stardom: the ethnographic star. See Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979); Francis, “Embodied Fictions, Melancholy Migrations: Josephine Baker’s Cinematic Celebrity,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 4: 824-845.

<sup>28</sup> Haney, *Naked at the Feast*, 121.

she lacked the purity and primitivity of the colonial subject. Her African identity was threaded through the decidedly less-mysterious and heterogeneous United States, where the reality of interracial sexual encounters and hysteria about the preservation of whiteness brought about the “one drop rule.”<sup>29</sup> As we have seen, this does not remove Baker from colonial or ethnographic rhetoric. It simply expands the rhetorical possibilities, the language, images, and associations that gathered to describe her body, identity, and performance. She could symbolize the most essential qualities of Africa, the American plantation, and the glamour of Paris. Everything, anything, or nothing. Infra-super-human. A phallic statue and a Creole lover, back from the dead.

In recent years, a number of scholars have engaged the paradoxical phenomenon of Baker’s popularity during the height of France’s second colonial empire. Samir Dayal reads Baker’s success as a symptom of the European desire not only to explore the unrepressed sexuality and strangeness associated with Africa, but also to *become* African. Baker allowed French audiences to indulge fantasies and perform new identities while they wholly avoided any encounter with real Africans or African images.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Janet Lyon notes that Baker allowed French audiences to indulge their fantasies and reaffirm their differences from both the African races that Baker represented and the white American audiences who had discriminated against her. In anointing Josephine Baker a star of the music hall, France celebrated its progressive acceptance of racial difference, “even while participating in an ironized

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<sup>29</sup> The one-drop rule was adopted in the U.S. South between 1890 and roughly 1930. It codified and strengthened the disfranchisement of most blacks and many poor whites. The one-drop rule stated that any individual with a trace of African ancestry was black and to be treated accordingly under the law. For histories of the one-drop rule in the United States, see James Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Matthew Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). For a study of the impact of the one-drop rule on racial identity and American cinema, see Gaines, *Fire and Desire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Samir Dayal, “Blackness as Symptom: Josephine Baker and European Identity,” *Blackening Europe*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 38-42.

colonialist tableau.”<sup>31</sup> These readings confirm my suggestion that, as an African-American, Baker operated as a mixed-race sign. She invited the desire for other bodies and places, sanctioned this voyeuristic pleasure, and reduced the stakes of the fantasy.

At the same time, these readings overlook the potential slippage that this regime of desire and identification implies. If Baker serves as a partial substitute for other, “pure” objects of desire, she always poses the potential threat of failure, subversion, or instability. The difficulty of pinning Baker down, of making her into the Dark Continent, the African Eros, or any other fixed image or identity is evident in the writing of both Levinson and Cummings, as well as Baker’s own self-description. This penchant to slip—out of reach and out of character—becomes more apparent in Baker’s transition from stage to screen, which we are now prepared to consider. In what follows, I offer a close reading of the precise ways in which these visual and semiotic instabilities manifest themselves in Josephine Baker’s first feature-length film, *La Sirène des tropiques*.

#### *La Sirène des Tropiques: Permeable Boundaries and Deleuzian Dream Worlds*

In the spring of 1927, following the success of her previous cinematic enterprises, Baker appeared in *La Sirène des tropiques*, a silent film directed by Henri Etiévant and a young Luis Buñuel.<sup>32</sup> In addition to this mélange of participants, Pierre Batcheff stars as one of the film’s central protagonists. At the time of the film’s release, most spectators would have recognized Batcheff from his previous film, Abel Gance’s

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<sup>31</sup> Janet Lyon, “Josephine Baker’s Hothouse,” *Modernism, Inc.: Body, Memory, Capital*, eds. Jani Scandura and Michael Thurston (New York: New York University Press, 2001): 29-47.

<sup>32</sup> Before the release of Baker’s first feature film, two collections of her music hall performances were exhibited in French cinemas. Though the first of these films remains lost (and untitled), the second film, entitled *La Revue des revues* (1926), includes footage from *La Folie du Jour*, one of Baker’s *Folies Bergère* performances. Dance sequences from the film were later used in several of Baker’s feature films, including *La Sirène des tropiques*.

experimental split-screen epic *Napoleon* (1927), released only a few months earlier.<sup>33</sup> Despite its title, the narrative bulk of *La Sirène des tropiques* unravels in the decidedly un-tropical household of the Sévéro family, a space made all the more uninhabitable and melancholic by its blue-hued tint. The introductory sequence moves methodically between intertitle and image, providing verbal-visual portraits of the Marquis Sévéro, “an investor with enormous claims in the Antilles...as lazy as he is rich,” and his wife, the Marquise. Following these introductions, the Marquis asks his wife for a divorce. In her refusal, the Marquise reveals the truth of her husband’s incestuous desires: “Enough charades!” she says, “You want a divorce so you can marry your goddaughter, Denise. I love that child too much to indulge your whims!” When the Marquis discovers Denise’s intention to marry the virtuous engineer, André Berval (Pierre Batcheff), he sends Berval to the Antilles to look after his territories, while simultaneously arranging to have him killed.

The film thus shifts to the vaguely described “down there...in the tropics,” and the sepia-toned adventures of Papitou. With a snug headscarf, enormous hoop earrings, and a collection of beads draped about her neck, Papitou appears an awkward assemblage of signs: both African-American “mammy” and exotic Caribbean native (Figure 4.1). Her father is a French colonialist who drowns himself in alcohol, while her Antillean mother remains wholly absent from the film. This genealogy marks Papitou as, at once, the child of a very literal encounter between the French empire and the Antilles, but also—in the narrative absence of her mother—the descendent of an ailing colonial patriarch and a dysfunctional empire. And yet, Papitou conforms in many ways to the image of the “pure” and primitive native: she speaks (via intertitle) without conjugated verbs, plays in the sun with childlike abandon, and displays an

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<sup>33</sup> Phil Powrie interestingly suggests that Batcheff would have been read as an exotic figure in the film as well, given his “Russian associations and acting style.” See “Josephine Baker and Pierre Batcheff in *La Sirène des Tropiques*,” *Studies in French Cinema* 8, no. 3 (October 2008).





Figure 4.1  
*La Sirène des tropiques*

abundance of flesh. A brief intertitle that arrives in the first few moments of the film exemplifies the multivalent expressions of race and nationality that are woven throughout *La Sirène des tropiques*. Papitou enters the frame to greet her father and exclaims, “Chair Papa!” For French viewers, this would have been an amusing written expression of Papitou’s linguistic failures. Rather than “Cher Papa!” or “Dear Father!” the intertitle substitutes the malapropism, “chair.” Though Papitou would have sounded French—“cher” and “chair” are phonetically interchangeable words—the intertitle undermines her, separates from her, and silently communicates her primitivity to a reading public. However, the phrase—“Chair Papa!”—is not without meaning. While it may make little sense as a common expression of affection, the term “chair” means, “flesh,” making Papitou’s greeting, “Flesh Father!” With one seemingly insignificant textual interruption, Papitou becomes a creature without language (or without control of the language), linguistically tied to French flesh. This complex ancestral constellation, communicated through myriad verbal and visual signs, encourages a reading of the many ways in which the film’s visually divided narratives—the French empire/bourgeois Sévéro family and the Antillean colony/Papitou’s mixed-race family—are joined.

The mise-en-scène of *La Sirène des tropiques* establishes an initial visual link between France and the Antilles, as well as between the Sévéro family and the bizarre triumvirate of Papitou, her father, and his henchman, Alvarez. Just as both “families” are sites of incestuous desire, orphaned women, and evil patriarchal figures, both settings—Paris and the Antilles—appear fantastic, otherworldly milieux. The film offers but one image of the Parisian cityscape, a strategically framed image of the infamous *Place de la Concorde*.<sup>34</sup> The remaining portion of the “Parisian” narrative

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<sup>34</sup> The image of the *Place de la Concorde* seems an interesting selection, perhaps intended to suggest yet another subtle fracture in the authority of the Sévéro family and the stability of the French empire. The *Place de la Concorde* was erected in 1755, and subsequently embellished with statues and

unravels almost entirely within the confines of the Sévéro home, an interior that visually corresponds to the abstract art-deco palette. The rigid linear arrangement of the Sévéro rooms and the geometric patterns that adorn the walls often buttress the narrative content of the scenes. For example, following the announcement of Denise and Berval's engagement, the film cuts to a close-up of their faces, tilted diagonally toward one another, mirrored by a series of diagonal lines that emerge from behind their shoulders and meet just above their well-posed expressions of bliss. The Marquis's study nevertheless disturbs these clean lines. Anticipating the disorienting global bric-a-brac of Père Jules's cabin in *L'Atalante* (Jean Vigo, 1934), the study serves as a reservoir of colonial objects and artifacts, as well as a startling meta-commentary on the film's narrative. The shelves and walls are filled with the spoils of colonial adventure, including a large ivory statue of two giraffes. These items are juxtaposed against a large collection of abstract modernist art objects. The axis around which most of the scenes in the Marquis's study turns—a large harem-esque couch layered with pillows—is framed by several portraits, including an image of a reclining black nude, a closely-framed portrait of Denise's visage, and an image of what seems to be none other than Josephine Baker.<sup>35</sup> This intersection of unexpected

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fountains, in honor of King Louis XV. During the French Revolution, the statue of Louis XV was torn down and—in the spot where nobility would regale themselves with public dismemberment of convicted criminals—the Guillotine was erected. The Place became the site of the *Terreur* and was temporarily renamed the *Place de la Révolution*. In *La Sirène des tropiques*, the image of the *Place de la Concorde* also contains the *Obélisque de Luxor*, given to France by an independent Egypt several decades after Napoleon's withdraw of the French army. Interestingly, the *Place de la Concorde* fascinated Georges Bataille, inasmuch as it bore the ghostly trace of public sacrifice and embodied what he believed to be the architectural erasure of such events, with its many monuments serving to cover and contain its threatening historical underbelly.

<sup>35</sup> Several months before the release of *La Sirène des tropiques*, Paul Colin published *Le Tumulte Noir*, a collection of forty-five hand-colored lithographs of Josephine Baker's silhouette in various poses of frozen movement. Though the camera never focuses its attention on the images that decorate the walls of Sévéro's study, one would be hard-pressed, as a Parisian spectator flocking to the films of Josephine Baker mere months after the release of Colin's lithographs and their persistent appearance in Parisian popular culture, to avoid linking the portrait of a cropped-haired woman of color and the silhouetted nude body of an anonymous black figure with the identity of Josephine Baker. Colin's lithographs have been reprinted along with critical commentary from Karen C.C. Dalton and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in

signs establishes a visual equivalence between the exotic Antilles and the world of the no-less strange and disorienting Sévéro family. The film offers no stable ground, no center of civilized reason or reality, from which to compare the Caribbean landscape. It marks both spaces as unpredictable and without locatable referents in the world.

Just as the film links the Sévéros with the Antilles, and opens up a dialogue between them, it likewise establishes a clear correspondence between the film itself and the Parisian world from whence it came. As exemplified by the images of Baker (or a Baker-esque look-a-like) in the Marquis's study, *La Sirène des tropiques* does not offer a hermetically sealed narrative, cast against a familiar setting. The film instead constructs a permeable boundary between representation and reality, fiction and truth. Its narrative of colonial adventure and music hall stardom communicates with the very real cultural phenomenon out of and for which *La Sirène des tropiques* was produced: Josephine Baker, her rise to fame, and the fascination with colonial bodies and places. This dialogue with the social, cultural, and artistic world that dwells beyond the frame of *La Sirène des tropiques* nurtures a gap between narrative content and cinematic image. Perhaps most notably, the image of Josephine Baker and the reclining black nude haunt the very space in which Berval and the Sévéro family ignore, sidestep, or vehemently deny the desirability of Papitou, while confirming over and over again their desire for the angelic Denise, her clothes and skin awash with such brilliant whiteness that she often appears to set the black and white tones of the film aglow. The film frequently rearticulates this incongruity between the familiar black body and face that adorn the walls of the Sévéro home and the narrative which refuses to see Papitou as more than a primitive child.

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Josephine Baker and 'La Revue Nègre': Paul Colin's Lithographs of 'Le Tumulte Noir' in Paris, 1927 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).

Papitou's passage from the Antilles to Paris—itself a spatial and narrative gap—similarly communicates this complex intersection of identities. This sequence suspends the narrative action, as well as the identity of Papitou. The ocean-voyage sequence offers an allegorical interlude that continues uninterrupted for nearly thirty minutes. It allows the comic gestures of Baker's stage performances a space to unfold and finally reveals the naked contours that brought so much attention to Baker in the music halls of Paris. It also narrates the story of Josephine Baker's "primitive" beginnings, struggles in American vaudeville theaters, eventual discovery in France (or, in this sequence, nude in the bathtub), and rise to European stardom and elegance. Nevertheless, this narrative "no-place" does not seamlessly shift from one identity (Papitou) to another (Baker), from the narrative of desperate and impossible love to an inconsequential game of cat-and-mouse and voyeuristic spectacle. In its retelling, *La Sirène des tropiques* gestures toward the *construction* of the tale, of the many identities with which Josephine Baker is associated. This narrative rupture also self-reflexively calls attention to the gap that emerges between the Baker of the cinematic screen and the Baker of *Les Folies Bergères*, foregrounding the boundaries of the film itself and the act of spectatorship underway.

The literal accumulation of layers guides this narrative pause. Unable to afford a ticket to board the departing steamship, Papitou plunges into the water and swims toward the awaiting vessel. With the help of a ship-hand, Papitou climbs a dangling rope—a gesture that recalls the tree climbing of Baker's stage spectacles—and tumbles from the porthole to the floor of the boiler room, soaking wet and barely recognizable. An intertitle emerges: "Harakko! Krikri! La—oo—ya!!! (War cry of the island natives)." Papitou runs upstairs, searching for a place to hide. As a passenger ambles down a hallway, she presses herself against the wall of an adjoining hall, only to quickly depart in another direction. The camera maintains its gaze upon

the damp trace left behind: the silhouette of Papitou's entire frame, including (most clearly) the rounded impression of her buttocks (Figure 4.2). Here, one cannot help but recall Paul Colin's lithographs and the many exaggerated figures that announced Baker's stage performances.

Papitou's search continues, as does her accumulation of unlikely additions to her skin. In her attempt to hide from passengers, Papitou soon stumbles, slapstick-fashion, into a room filled with coal. As though she cannot see herself through this newly acquired layer, Papitou pinches and pats her limbs (Figure 4.3). Her skin darker than before, her pillbox hat flattened and wrapped about her head, Papitou now appears the black-faced minstrel of American vaudeville. When an elderly passenger eventually catches sight of Papitou and alerts the captain—"Easy to recognize...She's all black"—Papitou takes refuge in the kitchen's flour bin. She thus acquires yet another layer and escapes the passenger's verbal description. Her flesh is white, her mouth and eyes dark by contrast. The film inverts Papitou's appearance and turns blackface on its head. When Papitou returns to the halls, she again encounters the elderly woman. This time, the newly-floured Papitou registers as "a ghost." Her lightened skin does not undo her status as "other," as a figure to be expelled from the ship, but makes her an even less-human oddity whose existence and presence is all the more uncertain.

The ocean-voyage sequence questions the camera itself and the stability of its vision, even as the myth of Baker's discovery and celebrity unfolds. When Papitou finally reaches an empty cabin, she stands in front of a mirror and sees her distorted image for the first time. Much like her previous self-examination, Papitou licks her finger and wipes it across her cheek, making sure that the self she knows still exists beneath the layers of salt water, charcoal, and flour (Figure 4.4). However, in this moment of visual certainty, the image becomes unstable. The film cuts to an extreme



Figure 4.2  
*La Sirène des tropiques*



Figure 4.3  
*La Sirène des tropiques*





Figure 4.4  
*La Sirène des tropiques*

close-up, the camera moves as though handheld, and Papitou begins to turn in circles. The film refuses vision and draws attention to what must be recognized, at least momentarily, as a cinematic scene. The camera and Papitou quickly regain their composure and the penultimate vision of any Baker performance on stage or screen, immediately follows. Papitou takes a bath, washing away the layers that created, distorted, and erased her while the camera feasts upon her naked flesh. In its concluding moments, the ocean-voyage sequence destabilizes vision yet again, this time explicitly alluding to the role of the spectator. As Papitou removes her clothes and washes away all that her skin has collected, the camera cuts to the search party just outside the cabin door. The film presents fragments of bodies—hands and feet pointing at the carpet—in close-up, followed by a striking aerial view that frames the overwhelming mass of searchers as they scramble for clues, footprints, or bits of floury residue. Throughout the ocean-voyage sequence, the film frequently irises out on Papitou *and* the searchers, the attention of the film thus balanced between both parties, with the absurdity of Papitou's shifting layers equaled only by the frenetic absurdity of the searchers. When Papitou exits the bathroom to greet the gathering of passengers and ship personnel, she is transformed. Wrapped in a beautiful feather robe, with her hair slicked back, Josephine Baker emerges and earns Papitou's passage aboard the ship (Figure 4.5). One of the women claims, "She seems very stylish to me. I shall take her into my service."

Though this lengthy sequence departs from the central narrative, in doing so, it opens up a space in which the film reflects upon the narrative itself, upon Papitou and Josephine Baker, and upon cinema and those that gather to consume its exotic images. As we have seen, Papitou moves through the many images and identities associated with Josephine Baker, from Jungle native to black-faced "mammy," from bumbling comedienne to naked darling, from frightening "other" to elegant European starlet.



Figure 4.5  
*La Sirène des tropiques*

These identities surface and dissipate quickly, like the accumulations on Papitou's skin. The ocean-voyage sequence thematizes the instability of the mixed-race body and the challenges it poses to vision and visual knowledge. She's black! She's a ghost! For Papitou, the darkened skin erases her body; for the (white) elderly passenger, it makes her all the more present. When Papitou cleans the layers off her skin, she receives a label contingent upon the (mis)recognition of the feathered robe. In the temporal middle of the film, spatially in-between the Antilles and France, the mixed-race body becomes the locus of unhinged, visual excess.

In the ocean-voyage sequence, the film also becomes a visual problem. The disorientating angles and movements of the camera—its aerial views, iris-ing out, and unstable frames—impede vision, while drawing attention to both the film's status *as film* and the spectator's desire to consume it. The dance sequences provide a similar opening and it is to the implications of this narrative site that I would like to turn the attention of this analysis.

Baker made a total of four commercial films in France, beginning with *La Sirène des tropiques*, followed by *Zou Zou* (1934), *Princesse Tam Tam* (1935), and, finally, *Fausse Alerte* (1940). Though each of these films casts Baker as a different colonial representative, within different settings and narrative frames, they nevertheless share two elements with startling reliability: unrequited love and intermittent eruptions of dance. In the case of the former, each film positions Baker as a lovesick native, swooning for the affection of a dashing French lead who uses Baker's character to win the love of another (white) woman, while remaining wholly unaware of Baker's desires and desirability. In the case of the latter element, each film transfers Baker from her native land to stardom in Paris, following a series of Pygmalion-Cendrillon inflected events. The films thus deliver the long-awaited event of any Baker film: her appearance onstage, hair-slicked, body exposed, legs in motion.

These films thrust Baker out of the threesome and into the spotlight, positioning her onstage so as to allow audiences to see what the narrative ostensibly forbids, ignores, or discards. While the music hall performances that surface in *La Sirène des tropiques* serve as a kind of compensatory gesture, intended to satisfy a desire that has been left unfulfilled by the film, they nevertheless produce a complicated remainder.

*La Sirène des tropiques* presents only one occasion for dance in the Antilles. After pledging her devotion to Berval and receiving a tepid response, Papitou spends the evening dancing against the glow of a fire. As she joins a villager in dance, the camera maintains a steady medium long shot of the dance circle's center, occasionally cutting to close-ups of the surrounding spectators. Much like the representation of the searchers during the ocean-voyage sequence, this sequence divides the spectators into parts and, in turn, divides its attention between those who perform and those who gather to watch. Hands. Eyes. Smiles. Hands. Finally, the camera cuts back to the medium long shot of Baker as she finishes her performance. Upon Papitou's arrival in France, the film repeats this sequence several times. The location changes, but its position within the narrative remains the same. The dance numbers always punctuate Berval's refusal of Papitou and each dance number draws attention to the act of spectatorship itself. True to form, following the death of the Marquis and the happy reunion of Denise and Berval, the film concludes with a dance number. Before Papitou takes the stage, an intertitle emerges: "That night, as she dances for the last time in Paris, as she pretends to be gay, she mourns her lost love, her illusions, all the sweetness of her youth." The film thus closes with Papitou on stage, smiling and dancing the Charleston. Like the ocean-voyage sequence, these moments of dance mark a break in the narrative and the coherence of Papitou. Dance suspends the diegesis and opens up a space for the world of Josephine Baker, the Parisian music hall, and colonial fantasy. These moments of dance transmit a kind of frantic and

uncontrolled excess. All that cannot be contained or communicated by the narrative bursts forth.

How might one begin to read these eruptions of dance, these confusing moments that refuse to blend seamlessly into the narrative or uphold the masquerade of fiction and of Papitou? How might one begin to understand the gaps and irreconcilable incongruities between narrative and dance, between the fantastic space of France-Antilles and the stage upon which Baker momentarily appears? While one might reasonably turn to the visual excesses of the American musical and the canonical scholarship of Jane Feuer and Rick Altman, this body of work does not account for the disruptive quality of Baker's dance performances in *La Sirène des Tropiques*. For her part, Feuer argues that musical cinema aims to bridge the gap between the impersonality of mass entertainment and the community of live performance. We are invited into the image and behind the scenes to experience the process of putting on a show. However, in Feuer's reading, all acts of demystification and division eventually lead viewers back to remystification: "The narrative gets sutured back together again by the final bow."<sup>36</sup> Rick Altman comes to a similar set of conclusions. He argues that the musical "has a dual focus, built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values."<sup>37</sup> For Altman, the entire structure of the musical film works toward the seemingly impossible merger of contradictory positions, the most significant of which is the union of the heterosexual couple. Each partner assumes the qualities of his/her opposite, flattening difference and creating a kind of perfect, singular whole. Both Feuer and Altman argue that the bursts of song

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<sup>36</sup> Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982): 44. Interestingly, Feuer acknowledges the parallels between musical cinema and the European avant-garde. Both offer disruptive moments of direct address, reveal the processes involved in the making of commercial entertainment, and include multiple diegeses of reality and dream. Godard meditates upon the discrepancies between reality and dream, while "in the Hollywood musical, heterogeneous levels are created so that they may be homogenized in the end through the union of the romantic couple," (68).

<sup>37</sup> Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1987): 19.

and dance in musical film function as a utopian problem-solving device. Though *La Sirène des Tropiques* mirrors one of the quintessential plot devices of musical film—the young girl who is discovered and makes it big in entertainment—the film fails to suture its seams in the same way that the American musical traditionally does. The dance numbers do not repair or reconcile. Rather, they introduce gaps and divisions, particularly between the central couple of Papitou and Berval, which never wind back to reconciliation. Papitou appears alone onstage, while the diegetic couple unites elsewhere.

Deleuze unexpectedly responds to the difficult questions posed by *La Sirène des tropiques*. In his reading of musical comedy, he focuses on American musicals, including the films of Busby Berkeley and Fred Astaire. However, his analysis deviates considerably from those of Feuer and Altman. Deleuze claims that every musical comedy belongs to one of two types. The first type temporarily gives way to movement and song, but inevitably reestablishes narrative stability. The second type of film *is* movement; there is no stable reality to which the film or the spectator can return. These two types of musical film loosely correspond to Deleuze's division between the *image-mouvement* and the *image-temps*, the character/narrative driven cinema that preceded World War II and the fragmented dream and memory-scapes that followed. Deleuze understands dance as an unfolding dream world, with the dancer(s) serving as a center of creative energy and movement: the dream-maker(s). Whether the temporary *image-mouvement* or the comprehensive *image-temps*, dance produces a space wherein other worlds and experiences can develop. In the case of the *image-temps*, he writes:

Dance is no longer simply movement of world, but passage from one world to another, entry into another world, breaking in and exploring [...] Dance is no longer the movement of dream which outlines a

world, but now acquires depth, grows stronger as it becomes the sole means of entering into another world, that is, into another's world, into another's dream or past.<sup>38</sup>

Dance in the *image-temps* opens a plurality of worlds and allows for a movement between these coexisting worlds. Each of these images, each of these worlds, defies the sensory-motor schema of the *image-mouvement*. The appearance of a new world does not allow the spectator to situate him/herself comfortably within the frame. Rather, it presents a continuous stream of disorienting dream worlds, fantasies, or memories.

Though by no means one of the elaborate Technicolor productions to which Deleuze refers, *La Sirène des tropiques* presents a plurality of worlds that seem to intersect with his conceptualization of dance in the *image-temps*. Papitou's dance numbers open a passageway from the dream worlds of Papitou's island playground and the stark geometry of the Sévéro home, to yet another. The dances themselves represent a multiplicity of worlds, identities, and temporalities. While Papitou's performances correspond to the narrative of her "discovery," this narrative explanation does not account for the cinematic experience of her appearances on-stage. Indeed, the signature "Baker" moves in Papitou's "native" dances, as well as the disjuncture in the final dance sequence between intertitle (i.e., "as she pretends to be gay, she mourns her lost love") and image (all smiles and Charleston), make clear that the dance numbers present far more than can be explained by the fictional character of Papitou. The dance numbers combine the image of Papitou with Josephine Baker. Her familiar gestures override the narrative, offering a swirling and unpredictable dream world, constructed not only upon the unexpected eruption of dance and the temporary suspension of Papitou's tale, but upon the very combination of identities

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<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 63.



that merge within the frame. These sequences of dance likewise open onto a world beyond the fictional Papitou and the iconic Josephine Baker. As evidenced by the writings of Levinson and Cummings, as well as the revision of *La Revue Nègre*, Baker's performances invited spectators to imagine themselves as ethnographers and explorers, illicitly peering through dense jungle brush to gaze upon the secret dance rituals of an unknown tribe. Baker's body and performance could signify an authentic Africa without, as Dayal and Lyon note, the kind of risks that accompanied *actual* ethnographic expedition. At the same time, the representation of dance in *La Sirène des tropiques* overlaps, in many ways, with that of the ethnographic expedition film, discussed in Chapter Three. The dance interrupts meaning and obstructs narrative sense. It opens up a space of tactility and sensation. One should also note that there is no hierarchy or visual order to these dream worlds. They emerge simultaneously and overwhelm the diegesis of *La Sirène des tropiques*.

*"Bonjour, Grand Frère": Excess and the Ethno-fiction Family*

The visual excesses of *La Sirène des tropiques* cannot be wholly explained by the singularity of Josephine Baker. The film straddles a divide between the specificity of its Parisian star and the broader category of "ethno-fiction." In this cinematic mode, the impulse to document other bodies and geographies collides with tales of romantic union, family struggle, financial deception, etc. Indeed, the distinct historical paths of ethnographic documentary and popular fiction filmmaking intersect within and upon the ethno-fiction film of the 1920s. Through a handful of shared visual and narrative forms, I would like to bring *La Sirène des tropiques* into contact with *Yasmina*, a little-known ethno-fiction film from 1926. In doing so, I hope not only to firmly trouble the perceived singularity of Josephine Baker's films—a prevalent interpretive thread that has only intensified with the careful restoration and re-release of her films

over the last decade—but also explore the contours of ethno-fiction filmmaking in greater detail. I do not offer *Yasmina* as a unique rejoinder to the seemingly unique *La Sirène des tropiques*. *Yasmina* is but one among hundreds of possible ethno-fiction films that we could consider alongside Baker’s cinematic work. While two strange films perhaps do not form a convincing pattern, I would like to resist the tendency in studies of ethnographic cinema to reduce ethno-fiction films to a list of titles and a blur of exotic names and locations. While the titles of ethno-fiction films signal a cultural obsession with Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, with expeditions across jungles and tours of sacred spaces, they do not adequately illustrate the unusual content and forms that obtain in this cinematic category. Divided between France and Africa, documentary and fiction, present and past, *Yasmina* generates the same kinds of visual excess and multilayered dream worlds that define *La Sirène des tropiques*. I will briefly sketch the film’s narrative—a difficult task, as will soon become clear—before outlining specific points of contact and overlap between these two examples of ethno-fiction filmmaking.

Directed on location in Paris, Nice, and Tunis by the prolific ethno-fiction filmmaker André Hugon, *Yasmina* mirrors the abrupt introductory moments of *La Sirène des tropiques*. Following a generous visual survey of the Tunisian landscape—energetically described as the “ORIENT!”—*Yasmina* introduces viewers to its namesake and the dreamy interiors that contain her. A gauzily-dressed Yasmina (Huguette Duflos) slowly wanders across rooms, poses against walls, and presses herself against the bars on her windows.<sup>39</sup> Her body slides through shadows, casting elaborate patterns across her face and torso. In turn, the camera mimics her slow and

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<sup>39</sup> Very little information is available on the life and identity of Huguette Duflos. She was born Hermance Joséphine Meurs and was a member of the *Comédie-Française* between 1924 and 1927. Her inclusion in the prestigious state theater suggests that she was not of “mixed” parentage or North African descent.

constant movement. It encircles her, follows behind her. Each new pose brings with it another sliver of her profile. Yasmina turns to face Alhima, her childhood nurse and nanny, and asks about her mother's youth. We learn that Yasmina is the daughter of Fanny Desprès who was "once surrounded by the infinite tenderness of her own family, celebrated by all, living an existence of dreams," but that "an unforeseen sickness tore her away from all that luxury and led her toward the light, toward Tunis, where the Grandier family welcomed her with hospitality." The scene fades to a flashback. Yasmina's mother (also played by Huguette Duflos) sits at a table with a man in European dress to her left, a man in a turban to her right, and a young boy on her lap. Alhima explains, "During a visit with the young Hector, son of the elder Grandier, who she loved like a son, your mother met Kais, your father." The flashback dissolves and Yasmina asks, "Whatever happened to Hector Grandier?" The image fades yet again, this time to what one presumes is the simultaneous present: the young Hector Grandier, now an adult, writes at a desk. An intertitle bears Alhima's explanation: "Hector is now a famous doctor, perhaps the most celebrated in Tunis."

Departing from the introductory moments of *Yasmina*, the narrative immediately begins to splinter, as do Yasmina's family ties. Kais, Yasmina's father, decides to marry a woman who insists on being Yasmina's "grande sœur." In turn, Yasmina marries Afsen, whose first wife, Manoubia, refers to Yasmina as her daughter. Yasmina shifts palaces—from her father's to her husband's—and, shortly thereafter, becomes ill. When the doctor comes to visit Yasmina, a flash of recognition overwhelms them both. Yasmina greets the man who cared for her mother and whom her mother cared for, "Bonjour, Grande Frère." From here, a not-so-conventional romance begins to unfold. The little sister falls in love with her big brother. The mixed-race woman desires the French leading man. The mother

substitute returns to choose the right family. Though the couple meets in secret, kissing and touching through veils and bits of cloth, theirs is an impossible passion. Yasmina ultimately kills herself with a knife through the chest and Afsen goes to jail for murder. And yet, the film finds a way to save them both. In a final scene, Hector extracts blood from his body with a tube and a jar (Figure 4.6). As he funnels the dark fluid into Yasmina's veins, her eyes flash open (Figure 4.7). She returns from the dead, from the mistakes of her mother's past, and from the nightmares and fantasies of her mixed-race body. The film concludes with the following confirmation: "Yasmina was dead for Afsen, just like she was dead for the Muslim world. On that day, a Muslim disappeared and a European was born."

Whereas *La Sirène des tropiques* overlays the narrative "problem" of Papitou with that of the Marquis and the threat he poses to Berval's life, *Yasmina* lacks any such narrative supplement. Indeed, Yasmina is *the* crisis that the film's narrative must resolve. Her mother chose the wrong side of the table, the wrong family. As a result, Yasmina languishes, lifelessly shifting through spaces, memories, and times, while her European "brother" exists productively elsewhere, outside. The film's introductory sequences communicate the narrative dilemma through subtle visual (e.g. a frame divided by a European suit and a Tunisian headdress) and verbal cues (e.g. "sickness overtook her" and "she went toward the light"). However, these cues grow increasingly direct. Lest any viewers doubt the narrative stakes of the film, an intertitle explains:

In the mind of Yasmina, a dangerous seed grew and Fanny Desprès was unknowingly to blame. Fanny's crime was to not understand that the European struggles thirstily for independence and liberty, while the Muslim dreams in agreeable languor. The European and the Muslim



Figure 4.6  
*Yasmina*



Figure 4.7  
*Yasmina*

are both happy. In order to remain this way, each must protect the race of which they are a part.

In taking the past racial “crime” of Fanny Desprès as its narrative point of departure, *Yasmina* begins with or emerges out of narrative instability. Something is amiss from the very start. In the logic of the film, however, the mixed-race body and narrative crisis coincide. Yasmina is both narrative guide and narrative obstacle. She quite literally and paradoxically embodies that which the narrative aims to overcome. Yasmina must be undone, disentangled, diffused, resolved. Rather than moving from equilibrium through crisis to resolution, *Yasmina* moves from embodied crisis to disembodied resolution. The narrative resembles a process of fragmentation, a fraying thread. Or, a (narrative) body torn to pieces. The body divides and coherent racial families are formed. The narrative likewise moves from present to past, and from reality to fantasy. With Huguette Duflos playing both mother and daughter, the concluding moment of European rebirth visually registers as the impossible return of Yasmina’s mother, Fanny Desprès, a character who emerges elsewhere in Yasmina’s dreams, flashbacks, and fantasies.

In posing Yasmina’s mixed-race body as a narrative problem in need of resolution, other problems emerge in the ethno-fiction film. Without the mixed-race body, the central narrative crisis dissolves along with the film’s voyeuristic guarantees. Like *La Sirène des tropiques*, *Yasmina* presents a confusing tension between narrative content and visual surface. On the one hand, Yasmina’s body must be resolved, purified, unmixed (or, like Papitou’s, banished from the narrative altogether); on the other hand, it is precisely the mixed-race body that invites viewers behind closed doors and into the harem to visually consume the Orient’s ethnographic pleasures. As long as the film indulges in “all the lascivious fantasy of the harem,” Yasmina must be kept whole (or wholly mixed). The film thus oscillates between

these two operations, between extracting Yasmina from the harem and positioning her firmly within it. Put another way, the ethno-fiction film hinges upon a two-fold contract with its viewers. First, the diegesis must refuse or resolve the ethnographic body, never uniting European and non-European characters in the narrative world of the film. Second, the ethno-fiction film must offer forbidden bodies and geographies as non-narrative sites of exploration and desire. *La Sirène des tropiques* offers Papitou's island paradise, Josephine Baker's elaborate dance performances, and the extended ocean-voyage sequence; *Yasmina* offers extensive footage of Tunis, the dreamscapes of the Arabian harem, and a number of fantastic flashbacks to Yasmina's errant "mother." Neither part of the ethno-fiction contract brings with it coherence, stability, or sense. Taken together, an impossible hybrid formula underlies the ethno-fiction film. Ignore the ethnographic subject and indulge the ethnographic impulse. Take the body apart and keep it whole. Tell a story and survey a body/landscape. In *Yasmina*, as in *La Sirène des tropiques*, these contradictory demands collide. The division between narrative reality and sensorial fantasy collapses. Each influences and inflects the other.

While *Yasmina* lacks the surging fantasies that Josephine Baker's body, performance, and image inspire, its central protagonist is nevertheless a maker of dream worlds. In Yasmina's presence, the film unexpectedly gives way to a number of narrative departures, including "harem" performances of fantasy and flesh. These scenes recall the form and function of dance in both *La Sirène des tropiques* and early expedition cinema. They satisfy the second obligation of the ethno-fiction "contract," offering the body as a site of movement and sensation. The harem scenes invite viewers to visually consume Yasmina's mixed-race body, but they also open onto other bodies and images. We watch Yasmina, we watch Yasmina watching others, and, finally, we leave Yasmina to examine others more closely. In one of the film's



many harem scenes, we find Yasmina on a throne, surrounded by women and children (Figure 4.8). The camera cuts between this small crowd and the spectacle unfolding before them. A group of female dancers—naked from the waist up—jump, dance, and roll on the floor (Figure 4.9-4.10). The camera initially shares Yasmina’s line of sight, but soon departs from this position to encircle the bodies with awkward and nearly impossible proximity. No intertitles emerge to explain the content of this scene or to transition viewers from narrative action to inaction, from sense to sensation. Like Papitou’s dance numbers, this visual interruption of torsos and breasts cannot be explained within the narrative confines of the film. The bodies of the harem are extra, excessive bodies. The narrative does not need them. Rather, these disruptive sites of sensorial surplus are for us: the curious explorers and ethnographers. In these moments of performance and dance, the film abandons narrative sense and changes direction. It reaches outward, into the theater, to addresses its spectators. The harem scenes exemplify the mediating function of the mixed-race body, as well as the ambivalent “tensions of meaning” it can produce. In these scenes, one loses the already fraying narrative thread, as well as the body (or bodies) that initially compel viewers to watch. In this visual frenzy, bodies become parts. Coherent silhouettes become fragments of flesh and cloth.

Beyond the harem, the dream worlds only multiply. Yasmina generates multi-layered flashbacks and fantasies whose spatial and temporal coordinates are made all the more ambiguous by the body that Yasmina and Fanny share. For example, as Yasmina glides through the corridors of Afsen’s palace, the scene fades to an image of Yasmina/Fanny lounging nude at the side of an indoor pool. The film depicts this space of female play and pleasure from a number of perspectives and distances. On the opposite side of the pool, women massage one another (Figure 4.11-4.12). In close up, they splash together in the water. This fantasy fades to another.



Figure 4.8  
*Yasmina*



Figure 4.9  
*Yasmina*

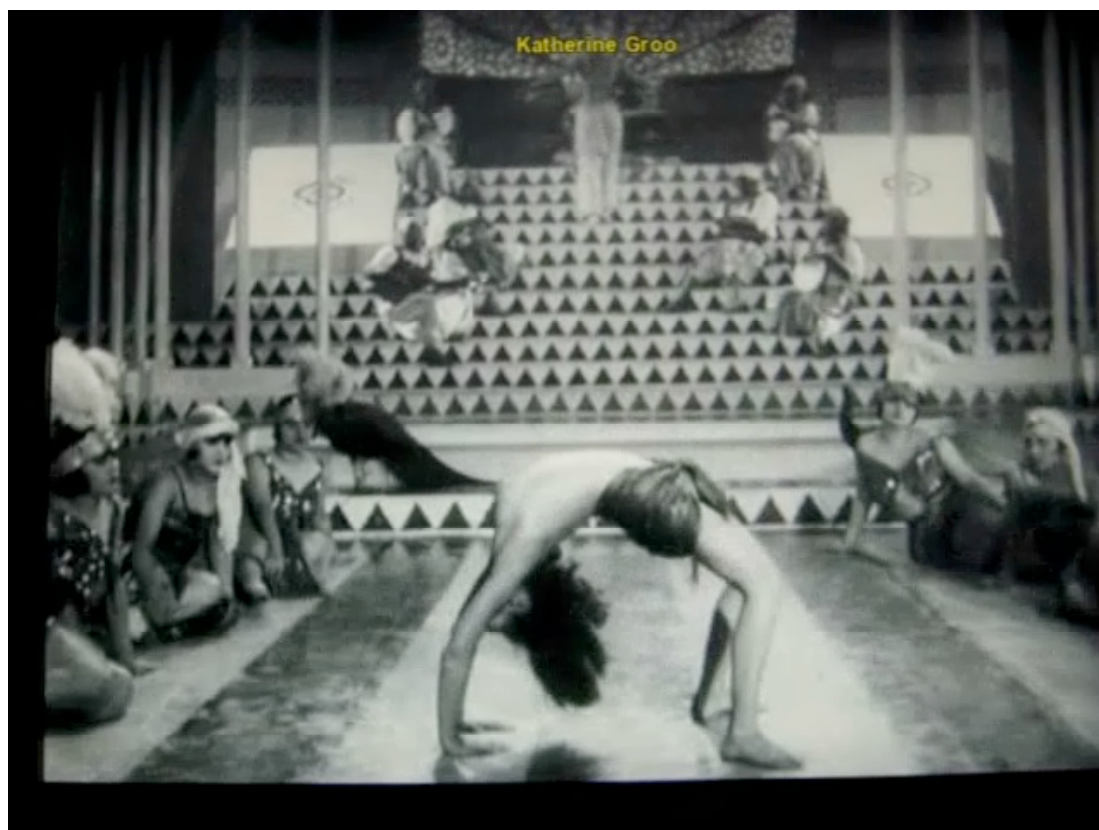


Figure 4.10  
*Yasmina*



Figure 4.11  
*Yasmina*



Figure 4.12  
*Yasmina*

Yasmina/Fanny appear in a European nightclub, dancing and drinking. The violent movements of the camera suggest a kind of Dionysian frenzy of bodies in motion. The fantasy fades back to Yasmina in the palace, and then reinitiates the spectacular cycle of poolside play and European dance. Woven between these images of Tunisia/Europe, the intertitle suggests that a “dangerous seed” of racial difference grew in Yasmina. However, this explanation fails to disambiguate the image, to secure its contents as flashback, fantasy, or future possibility. Do these images depict Fanny’s past planting of the seed? Or are they Yasmina’s fantasies, and thus the dangerous fruit born of her divided seed/self? The intertitle allows for multiple readings of the image. While this collage of dream worlds creates sites of spectatorial pleasure and narrative departure, offering viewers the penultimate Orientalist fantasy of “cloistered” lesbian encounters, these sequences equally erode the divide between reality and dream, present and past, Yasmina and Fanny. The narrative departure ceases to be a brief moment of fantasy, spatially confined to the harem. Dream worlds layer upon dream worlds and one can no longer securely mark the return to the “real” Yasmina or the “real” narrative action. Moreover, no matter how one interprets the ambiguous text that accompanies these images, the film firmly grounds this erosion of visual and narrative coherence in Yasmina’s mixed-race body. In short, *Yasmina* unravels, alongside Yasmina.

These visual and narrative instabilities become all the more evident when Yasmina re/unites with Hector. After this encounter, Yasmina becomes a mobile protagonist who moves through space and time, reality and dream. She shifts between the interiors of the palace, the streets of Tunis, and the city’s French dance halls. She also slides from Tunisian dress to European dress and back again. In taking to the streets of Tunis and donning European clothing, Yasmina performs a narrative function. She becomes more European, less Tunisian, and inches ever-closer to her



successful undoing and escape. Nevertheless, these narrative events and transformations simultaneously register as repetitions of fantasies and flashbacks that have unfolded elsewhere. Yasmina transforms into the ghostly image of her dead mother and/or the “real” embodiment of the self she once imagined in the European dance hall. Moreover, in these movements between palace and dance hall, interior and exterior, the film repeats precisely the kinds of dislocations that define its dream world disruptions. One can no longer determine where or when the dream worlds end and the “real” narrative worlds begin. Indeed, one could read the incredible death and resurrection with which the film concludes as an effort not only to purify Yasmina—to replace her mixed blood with the pure blood of family—but also to recuperate the film, to make a clear break with the fraying narrative thread that, with each passing scene, seems only to further divide and veer off in improbably strange directions. But even in death, Yasmina and *Yasmina* are difficult to “pin down” or purify. The smartly dressed woman who survives her own death and moves to Europe is also the dead woman, tainted by interracial “crimes,” with which the film begins. The final scene of a passenger ship sailing away from Tunis signifies both a pure beginning and a mixed return.

In a discussion of post new wave cinema, Deleuze lingers on the kinds of female bodies that populate the work of Chantal Akerman, Agnès Varda, and Michèle Rosier, among others. Out of this strikingly different visual, historical, and political context, Deleuze offers a kind of pedagogy for reading the body of ethno-fiction film. With an archival knowledge of film history, he nimbly charts changes in the bodies of cinema, in the gestures and postures that they assume, and in the ways they communicate meaning. Deleuze makes an argument about the body in new wave and post wave cinema, but he also implicitly argues *for* the body. He argues for a reading



of the body as an important sign within and across a number of post-war film traditions:

The post new wave will continually work and invent in these directions: the attitudes and postures of the body, the valorizing of what happens on the ground or in bed, the speed and violence of coordination, the ceremony or theatre of cinema which is revealed [...] Certainly the cinema of bodies does not proceed without risk: a glorification of marginal characters who make their daily life into an insipid ceremony; a cult of gratuitous violence in the linkage of postures; a cultivation of catatonic, hysterical or simply refuge attitudes [...] And we end up being tired of all these bodies who slide along the wall and then find themselves squatting on the ground. But since the new wave, every time there was a fine and powerful film, there was a new exploration of the body in it [...] The chain of states of the female body is not closed: descending from the mother or going back to the mother, it serves as a revelation to men, who now talk about themselves, and on a deeper level to the environment, which now makes itself seen or heard only through the window of a room, or a train, a whole art of sound. In the same place or in space, a woman's body achieves a strange nomadism which makes it cross ages, situations and places (this was Virginia Woolf's secret in literature). The states of the body secrete the slow ceremony which joins together the corresponding attitudes, and develop a female gesture which overcomes the history of men and the crisis of the world.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 195-96.

Both *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina* lack the political thrust of post new wave feminist films. Neither Papitou, nor Yasmina overcomes the history of men, the crisis of colonialism, or the oppressive gazes so well articulated by cummings and Levinson. But the mixed-race female bodies that inhabit so many ethno-fiction films are not facile or taxidermic figures. Nor can they be cast aside as firmly entrenched in the classical mode of narrative cinema. As we have seen, they can be axes of subversion and sources of excess. They can be narrative nomads who cross “ages, situations and places.” They can be hard to locate, pin down, understand. Moreover, they can make nomads of the narratives that try to contain them. Deleuze suggests a way to begin analyzing the body of ethnographic cinema and the mixed-race women who populate the “cloisters” of ethno-fiction film. He attends to the gestures, poses, and movements of the body, as well as the forces that body exerts upon cinema, its images and narratives. We do not yet have the theoretical vocabulary or apparatus to describe these bodies, to read them with care. I take the *image-temps* as an initial critical tool.

*Narrative Nomads/Nomadic Narratives: The Mixed-Race Body of Ethno-Fiction*

Ethno-fiction films are defined by mixture. *La Sirène des Tropiques* and *Yasmina* are patchworks of visual and narrative convention, torn between popular fiction and ethnographic documentary. In their imprecise union of forms, these films exceed the sum of their parts and become something new, something else. They disrupt and distort the categories of which they are a part. These films tell stories with central characters who encounter and overcome obstacles. As viewers, we follow Papitou and Yasmina, their lives in exotic places, their experiences on city streets, and their entanglements with forbidden white men. However, these spatial coordinates soon dissolve into dream and these stories wander, aimlessly, elsewhere. We leave the coherence of interior spaces for languorous pans of unfamiliar landscapes. We leave

linear narrative action for ocean-voyage adventures and poolside massage. We leave colonial terrain for European cities, only to loop back through dream worlds and fantasies. The nomadic quality of these films owes to their generic collage, as well as to the mixed-race figures that they take as narrative guides. Divided between modes of being and expression, between narrative bodies and visual worlds, *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina* mirror the methodologies and *effects* of the *image-temps*.

Deleuze's cinema books loosely divide twentieth-century film history into two parts. The *image-mouvement*, or the movement-image, describes the pre-war era of classical narrative cinema, while the *image-temps*, or the time-image, examines the post-war waves of experimental, independent, and auteur filmmaking. Beyond this historical divide, what separates the *image-mouvement* from the *image-temps* is the relationship—or lack thereof—between model and copy, between the world “outside” and the image that aims to represent it. Deleuze understands the Platonic theory of Ideas as one which distinguishes between a thing and its image, an original and its copy, so as to select “lineages: to distinguish pretenders; to distinguish pure from impure, the authentic from the inauthentic.”<sup>41</sup> In the platonic formulation of model and copy, the copy attempts to resemble its model, the Idea of a thing. Deleuze writes, “*Copies* are secondary possessors. They are well-founded pretenders, guaranteed by resemblance.”<sup>42</sup> In marked contrast, “the *simulacra* are like false pretenders, built upon dissimilarity, implying an essential perversion or deviation.”<sup>43</sup> The simulacrum disrupts the relationship between model and copy, hindering the selection of lineages and obscuring the differences between them. Indeed, the simulacrum “places in question the very notations of copy and model.”<sup>44</sup> It resembles nothing else. No

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<sup>41</sup> Deleuze, “The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy,” *Logic of Sense*, 254.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

model exists, no idea corresponds to its form. The simulacrum threatens the whole, the one, Plato's Idea.

By way of example, Deleuze explains that modern literary procedures allow several stories to be told at once. These stories, however, do not provide different points of view of the same narrative. They cannot be unified as a collective vision of a singular object or experience. Instead, "it is rather a question of different and divergent stories, as if an absolutely distinct landscape corresponded to each point of view."<sup>45</sup> These stories come into contact with one another, producing the disorienting effects of the simulacrum, the phantasm, the ideational surface. Divergent bodies mix, merge, divide, and return. Simulacra rise to the surface and take their place among models and copies. Simulation signals a "becoming mad" that Plato wholly excludes from his system of model and secondary resemblances. While Deleuze's ontology allows for the existence of fixed beings and identities, the revelry of the simulacrum continually disrupts, decenters, and disorients these beings. He writes, "The Nature of things is coordination and disjunction. Neither identity nor contradiction, it is a matter of resemblances and differences, compositions and decompositions, 'everything is formed out of connections, densities, shocks, encounters, concurrences, and motions.'"<sup>46</sup> Deleuze thus describes a "nature of things" sharply coincident with the nature of cinema.

As its name suggests, the *image-mouvement* represents movement, fluidity, and unbroken duration. The films that belong to this visual taxonomy obey classical paradigms of narrative continuity and rely upon techniques of visual coherence. Like copies, they are well-founded pretenders that aim to resemble a unified model of reality. The *image-mouvement* furnishes "sensory-motor situations." Its characters

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 268. In this passage, Deleuze cites from Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse and M.F. Smith (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1975), I: 633-634.

move toward foreseeable objectives and resolutions. Its narratives adhere to these movements. Its spaces and settings accommodate them. In short, the *image-mouvement* represents visible, understandable forms. On the other side of Deleuze's historical division, the *image-temps* marks a radical break with the tidy linear constructions of the *image-mouvement*. It introduces what Deleuze terms "pure optic and sound situations." Objects, characters, sounds, colors—all the elements that compose the image—acquire values independent of the reality to which they may (or may not) refer. The hierarchy between character and space dissolves. The *image-temps* establishes an equilibrium between bodies, be they the physical bodies (or parts of bodies) of its characters, a particular sound, the pronunciation of a word, a camera angle, a cast shadow. These bodies collide and divide continuously, moving in multiple and unexpected ways. The *image-temps* offers no image of a unified, comprehensible world. It produces only the incorporeal effects of the simulacrum, of bodies combining and dividing, the event of sensation at the surface. Moreover, the *image-temps* foregoes any distinction between reality and fantasy, present and past, waking and dream life. With the arrival of post-war cinema, "we run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask."<sup>47</sup> The *image-temps* engages in a process of continual displacement. It presents multiple and conflicting worlds that nevertheless belong to the same image, the same film, the same *récit*. There is no other world, or truth, against which its images can be judged. Moreover, no character or narrator provides a singular or "true" perspective out of which the film unfolds.

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<sup>47</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 7.

And yet, the *image-temps* is a cinema of the body. Not the body of a coherent guide, but of the postures and gestures of disembodied or unthinking parts. Deleuze invokes a metaphor that returns us to Bhabha (via Fanon): a multiplicity of masks in which the lifting of one reveals only an infinity of others. The *image-temps* never reveals its “true” body, never reaches the static position from which to do so. It moves erratically from the everyday to the ceremonial, from part to part, gesture to gesture. But as Deleuze conceives it, the *image-temps* has no need for visible, coherent bodies:

If cinema does not give us the presence of the body and cannot give us it, this is also because it sets itself a different objective; it spreads an ‘experimental night’ or a white space over us; it works with ‘dancing seeds’ and ‘luminous dust’; it affects the visible with a fundamental disturbance, and the world with a suspension, which contradicts all natural perception. What it produces in this way is the genesis of an ‘unknown body’ which we have in the back of our heads, like the unthought in thought, the birth of the visible which is still hidden from view.<sup>48</sup>

The *image-temps* creates absent bodies, imperceptible bodies, unknowable bodies. Like Alice in Carroll’s tale, these bodies are divided between past and future, inside and outside, something and nothing. They are bodies caught between “two groupings, two modes of life, two sets demanding different attitudes.”<sup>49</sup> They cannot choose (between other bodies, other settings, other modes of life). Rather, they oscillate between options, assuming one attitude, then another, one gesture, then another. As viewers, we receive nothing affirmative: no body, no narrative, no-thing. Only bodies as voids, or disruptive simulacra.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 202.

Well before the post-war era of avant-garde and experimental film, we run into “a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility.” Ethno-fiction cinema produces what Deleuze might term “impure optic situations.” Divided between popular fiction and ethnographic documentary, these films exhibit signs of the *image-mouvement*, only to disrupt, distort, and discard them. In the ethno-fiction film, narrative sense and visual coherence transform into sensation and dream. Like the simulacrum, ethno-fiction obscures the relationship between model and copy, as well as its own foundation of generic forms. One cannot isolate and separate its lineages. Ethno-fiction aims elsewhere, beyond coherent characters and narrative understanding. It works with ‘dancing seeds’ and ‘luminous dust,’ with bodies that linger just beyond view. The protagonists of ethno-fiction shift unexpectedly through spaces and times. They signify in manifold and ever-expanding ways. Papitou and Yasmina become sites of fantasy and dream, tactility and touch. They divide into infinite parts, gestures, attitudes, images. Each takes on its own autonomous value, equivalent to the fragments of landscape that share the frame. One could consider Papitou’s ocean-voyage interlude: the film divides her into parts and gestures, some signaling her Parisian music hall performances, others the American south, and still others the milieu of a primitive and tropical paradise. One could equally turn to Yasmina’s multi-layered dream worlds: signs of France and Tunisia, past and present, lover and mother emerge and dissipate, swirl together, and unsettle the foundations of the film’s diegetic world. Reality and dream become indistinguishable.

Like its post-war counterpart, ethno-fiction is a cinema of the body. The mixed-race body of ethno-fiction is divided between “groupings” and modes of life. It partakes of both the civilized world and the utopian islands and outbacks that entice the Western imagination in its thinking the Other. As a work of fiction or fantasy, it becomes the repository for any-discourse/image-whatever. The ethno-fiction body is

malleable, moveable, uncontrollable. All at once, it performs sameness and difference, innocence and brutality, the grotesque and the beautiful, etc. It participates without the kinds of resistance or refusals that typify ethnographic documentary. And yet, the mixed-race body is overburdened with signs. It may not walk out of frame or grab the camera, but the divisions it sustains are not without visual and narrative consequences. As a protagonist, it cannot guide viewers through space and across time. It wanders between bodies, parts, images. It transforms into other spaces, times, possibilities. We cannot locate the “real” body or the “right” narrative. Removing one mask only reveals another. In the exceptional ethno-fiction of Josephine Baker, the groupings or modes between which she is divided expand. Baker’s characters wander between the very paradoxes assigned to all other guides of ethno-fiction, as well as associations with the American south, the Parisian music hall, slavery, and celebrity. One cannot keep track of the gaps and interstices that emerge, the multiple bodies and identities at play, or the movements between them.

Both *La Sirène des tropiques* and *Yasmina* strike at the very real stakes of the ethno-fiction *image-temps*. They produce “the genesis of an ‘unknown body’ which we have in the back of our heads.” They produce something unseen, off-screen. They gesture toward a world outside of representation, beyond the limits of ethnographic practice and popular fiction. This beyond or outside or unseen is nevertheless “there,” as much a part of the film as its diegesis or visible world. These films likewise push against the historical limits that Deleuze assigns to the absences of the *image-temps*. Many works of the post-war avant-garde generate the “unknown body” of World War II, the gaping trauma of bodies that could not be counted or mourned or remembered. It is a cinema of holes, silences, and blank screens. Ethno-fiction lacks the self-awareness and self-reflection of the avant-garde. It never explicitly meditates on the limits of representation or the visual ontology of cinema. It does not issue a radical



condemnation of the ethnographic practices that precede it. And yet, it bears the trace of an unknown, an emptiness, a void. Ethno-fiction films generate the unknown body of colonial incursions and ethnographic encounters, the body that continues coherently beyond the relentless efforts to measure, weigh, record, dissect, and taxonomize, beyond the language of sensation and stereotype, beyond the popular images of romance and adventure. It is a cinema that articulates its own boundaries, whether it wants to or not. Though marked by visual excesses, indecipherable presences, and screens filled with flesh, it is a cinema of failed narratives, absences, and *image-temps*.

CODA:  
ETHNOGRAPHY AND ITS CRITIQUE

At turns, I have described early ethnographic cinema as insecure, uncertain, dialogic, multivalent, incoherent, and illegible. This loose collection of terms betrays the difficulty of describing ethnographic cinema, of both locating its institutional boundaries (what is ethnographic cinema?) and relaying its visual forms (what does it look like?). In her own study of this cinematic mode, Alison Griffiths describes an object always moving beyond her reach, slipping through her fingers and out of view: “I soon realized that the terrain I was entering, while intellectually stimulating, was amorphous and potentially boundless. In my pursuit of precinematic antecedents and institutional horizons for ethnographic film, cinema sometimes seems like a vanishing point on an ever-receding landscape.”<sup>1</sup> Griffiths sketches two dividing lines in this introductory remark. The first separates her spectatorial desires from the ephemeral and frustrating visions, which rest briefly upon the horizon before disappearing from view. The second separates the pre-cinematic ethnographic institution from its post-cinematic incarnation. The museum opens itself up for easy inspection and study. One can touch its walls and walk its corridors. Fixed images can be held in the hand, carefully framed, and put on display. Field notes and published ethnographic works can be pulled from a shelf and cited in full. Cinema recedes from these sturdy regimes of ethnographic representation. It lacks the same kind of material and institutional weight.

Replete with the appendages of negation or undoing (e.g. un-, il-, non-, in-, etc.), the collection of terms that I deploy in this dissertation ascribes a kind of resistance or antinomy to early ethnographic cinema. In its breadth and seeming imprecision, this vocabulary likewise wrestles with the simultaneous and manifold

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): xi.

lines of subversive force that seem to emanate from the ethnographic film image toward the operator and the spectator, as well as the institutions of science and cinema from whence it comes. Surely, the conditions of cinematic representation—the encounter between camera and subject, ethnographer and Other—furnish a kind of first order of resistance, contingency, or disruptive play. Operators chase dancing bodies, dying flesh, and signs of startling difference. Subjects confront the camera, block the lens, and walk out of frame. Mobilities layer upon mobilities. Bodies become parts. Expeditions transform into a chaotic visual flux. In the transition from single to multi-shot ethnographic cinema, any-instant-whatever joins any-other-available-instant. Images and events are united in the expression of the fantastic and the unfamiliar, rather than the coherent and comprehensible (landscape, body, event, encounter, etc.).

In their projection, early ethnographic films can shock, assault, confuse, overwhelm, and bore. They were constructed before and beyond the circuits of narrative film production and distribution, in unusual and interstitial spaces: the personal archive, the academic department, the colonial exhibition. These films frequently escape, ignore, or refashion the demands of narrative cinema. They wander through space and extend across time. Excessive, repetitive, and potentially boundless. Indeed, early ethnographic films seem to lack perceptible edges and ends. Some deliver an utterly unstructured assemblage of people and places; others shift through multiple frameworks and narrative guides, registering a cacophony of voices, tones, and trajectories. In Chapter One, I liken the ethnographic film image to the meandering and unproductive “acinema,” theorized by Jean-François Lyotard.<sup>2</sup> Acinema wastes time, energy, effort. It gets distracted, moving in unpredictable ways

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<sup>2</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, “Acinema,” *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, edited by Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 349-359.

and directions. It is a roving eye, responsible only for seeing, recording, and showing the visual world that it encounters. Acinema draws its meaning and force out of not-being and not-generating (stories, characters, conclusions, etc.). It aims beyond profit or entertainment, toward elsewhere or nowhere in particular. The division between cinema and acinema maps onto the divisions that inform the Lumière film archive: actuality and ethnography, domestic and expedition, here and elsewhere. Acinema opens onto new ways of reading and understanding this particular collection of films. However, if one broadens this cinematic horizon beyond the earliest film images and the eccentricities of operator ethnographies, the acinematic tension between form and formlessness, sense and nonsense equally exemplifies the relationship between the wide terrain of early ethnographic cinema and mainstream narrative film.

With *Nanook of the North* removed from the field of cinema under consideration, the claim that early ethnography radically differs from the organizing structures of popular fiction perhaps comes as little surprise. But the import of acinema cannot be reduced to this small and singular distinction. It is not a matter of finding the “right” visual or institutional category with which to associate this cinematic mode, but of overturning categories altogether. Looking beyond the antagonism with narrative film genres, one encounters seemingly endless fronts of resistance, overturning, and subversive possibility. Remarkably, early ethnographic cinema undermines the aims of objectivity and impartial observation that tend to circumscribe non-fiction film. That is to say, one cannot extract the contents of ethnographic cinema from the effects of mechanical reproduction: the relentless motion, boundless surveys, partial frames, etc. In early ethnographic cinema, the camera is not an invisible, undetected witness. Rather, the distinction between cinema and subject evaporates. The actions that unfold before and behind the lens collide, with both fields mutually imbricated, mutually participating in a vast landscape of

moving, changing otherness. In this way, early ethnographic cinema gestures toward the industrialized kino-eye to come. The trappings of what one might call “cinematic vision” are as much a part of the ethnographic image as the dancing bodies and dying flesh, the scenes of sacrifice and strange rituals. Both are inscribed within the frame, equally constitutive of what one sees and experiences. One loses (or perhaps never really had) that stable, exceptional ground reserved for the professional ethnographer, the scientist, or the documentarian. One cannot distinguish between here and elsewhere, self and other, cinema and subject. Equilibrium stretches across the flickering screen, enveloping the contents of the frame and the signs of its construction.

In this merger of cinema and subject, mechanical reproduction and ethnographic content, early ethnographic cinema resists the very particular demands of ethnographic practice. These films do not index a prior physical or social reality, an independent or external ethnographic subject. They fail to reproduce objects or individuals, antecedent to their mechanical production or projection. Steven Shaviri makes a similar argument against the whole of cinema. He writes, “In film, there can be no firm guarantees of identity and presence. Even the most naturalistic *mise-en-scène* is fragmented and framed in ways that are incompatible with monocular representational space, or with that of a proscenium theater [...] Every attempt to manipulate and to order the flow of images only strengthens the tendential forces that uproot this flow from any stability of meaning and reference. Cinematic vision pushes toward a condition of freeplay: the incessant metamorphoses of immanent, inconstant appearances.”<sup>3</sup> In early ethnographic cinema, this foundational condition of cinematic freeplay encounters a wildly insecure visual field. Put another way, the infinite visual variations of cinema collide with the endless terrain of unfamiliar bodies, objects,

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Shaviri, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993): 39.

practices, and events. Freeplay meets freeplay. As a result, the ethnographic film image overflows taxonomies, crosses and combines genres, and constructs a potentially limitless catalogue of useless images. Early ethnographic cinema does not serve as the tool, the reference, or the record of that which exists in the world, before and beyond the camera. The images that it generates have no ethnographic value, no referential utility. Instead, early ethnographic cinema creates singular visual events. As a supplement to ethnographic writing, it does not fill in the gaps, or create a more coherent body of research. Its supplement is unnecessary, unwanted, and excessive. Like the ethnographic subject itself, it belongs elsewhere, outside.

In outlining these fronts of resistance and joining the early ethnographic film image with a concept like acinema, I am making a claim about the relationship between, on the one hand, this early visual practice and, on the other, cinematic modes and scientific institutions. As I argue here and throughout this dissertation, early ethnographic cinema is a resistant force, entirely incompatible with other cinematic or epistemological categories. Neither this, nor that. Neither science, nor cinema. Neither documentary, nor narrative. The uncategorizable outside. While any understanding of early ethnographic cinema must negotiate these seemingly countless sites of resistance and counter-production, in the process of dislocating early ethnographic cinema from its ethnographic and cinematic genealogy, the materiality of these films can disappear into the distance, as Griffiths so well describes. One can lose sight of the ethnographic image, of what these films actually produce and how they mean. Beyond these articulations of resistant non-being, what remains of ethnographic cinema? What does its counter-productive force produce? Of what use or significance is a wandering, fragmentary, overwhelming ethnographic catalogue? What matter can we recuperate? Indeed, what is its matter, its material, its weight? Although early ethnographic cinema resists ethnographic and cinematic categories, it

remains tied to these fields of study, practice, and production. The affirmative content we are searching for emerges out of these encounters, these shared points of contact, and the resistant energies that, from a certain perspective, seem weightless, negative, and immaterial.

In his essay, “One Less Manifesto: Theatre and its Critique,” Gilles Deleuze describes Carmelo Bene’s reformulations of “major” theatrical works as formative acts of criticism and what he terms “minoration.” Bene’s theatre is a “minor” one, whose operation dismantles the hegemony of major theatrical works and institutions. As Deleuze defines it, minor status can apply to a work of art, a language, even a gesture. The relationship between the minor and the major—like that which joins acinema to cinema—exceeds simple oppositions or binary contradictions. The minor is a part of the major. It exists alongside of it, within it. But the minor disturbs the major, subtracts from its well-known form, piece by piece, constantly changing its images, icons, etc. The minor exposes the rigidity and oppressive power of major forms—unchanged but for the interventions of its pernicious counterpart—while creating an altogether new and radically different work. Minoration simultaneously subtracts and constructs, critiques and creates. Deleuze explains:

There would appear to be two contrary operations. On the one hand, one ascends to ‘the major’: one makes a doctrine from a thought, one makes a culture from a way of life, one makes History from an event. One thus pretends to discover and admire, but in fact one normalizes [...] Then, operation for operation, surgery against surgery, one can conceive the opposite: how ‘to minorate’ (*minorer*, a term employed by mathematicians), how to impose a minor treatment or a treatment of

minoration to extract becomings against History, lives against culture,  
thoughts against doctrine, graces or disgraces against dogma.<sup>4</sup>

Early ethnographic cinema operates like the minor theatrical work. It is a seed of criticism whose roots descend into its own history and ontology. It critiques the very forms of which it is a part. Indeed, early ethnographic cinema minorates major ethnographic institutions, including natural history museums, colonial exhibitions, academic departments, written studies, and photographic displays. It also minorates the trappings of major cinema, among them the narrative and non-fiction genres, the for-profit regimes of production and distribution, and even the space/experience of the popular film theater. Like the minor work of theater, early ethnographic cinema removes pieces and parts. It operates on the major forms that precede it, contain it. In the case of ethnographic practice, it subtracts spatial distance, written communication, and authorial control. From major cinema, it excises coherent stories and visible worlds, indexicality and objectivity.

Through its minor operations—its adjustments and extractions—an enormous space of negation and non-being comes into view. As I have outlined extensively here and elsewhere in this dissertation, early ethnographic cinema is often perceived through a prism of absence and lack, nonrepresentation and nonreproduction. Nevertheless, it is within this failed, misshapen, seemingly wasted space that the force of a minor ethnography/cinema coheres. Of Carmelo Bene's *Richard III*, Deleuze writes, "In performing the subtraction of characters of State Power, Bene gives free reign to the creation of the soldier on stage, with his prosthesis, his deformities, his tumors, his malpractices, his variations. The soldier has always been considered in mythology as coming from an origin different from that of the statesman or the king:

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<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "One Less Manifesto," *Mimesis, Masochism, & Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, ed. Timothy Murray (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997): 243.



deformed and crooked, he always comes from elsewhere.”<sup>5</sup> Without the presence of State Power, the play and its characters become lopsided, disfigured, malformed. A simultaneously failed story and soldier. Nothing is as it should be. Nothing maps onto the terrain that we know, understand, or expect from Shakespeare. And yet, out of this utterly shapeless and disorientating figure, Bene produces the minor underbelly, the always-present possibility, or what one might call, following Malcolm Crick, a cracked mirror. A similar kind of amputee, early ethnographic cinema undermines the authority and praxes of major ethnographic/cinematic institutions through sheer visual abundance and freeplay. Much like the disfigured soldier, early ethnographic cinema disorients and confounds with constant movements and transformations. Nothing looks as it should, as it was described in public lectures or published field guides. In the space that separates the minor from the major, early ethnographic cinema produces a new visual world, as well as a devastating critique. It questions ethnographic fact and cinematic form, their nature and necessity. Early ethnographic cinema suggests that the major can be altered, or otherwise. It can be formless and failed, incomprehensible, indescribable, and uncontained. The senseless, the misshapen, the altogether different lingers just beneath the surface of the majors, perceptible after only minor adjustments and amputations. The minor is a constant, ever-present threat to the authority of major bodies and authors.

The distinction between major and minor likewise brings the very real political stakes of majority power and minority resistance to the fore. Indeed, this distinction extends well beyond the domains of literary canons and cultural production. It also applies to countries, peoples, and ideas. According to Deleuze, the division between “major” and “minor” separates “history and antihistoricism, that is to say, specifically, ‘those that History does not take into account.’ It divides the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 240.

structure and the vanishing lines that traverse it. It divides the people and the *ethnic*. The ethnic is the minority, the vanishing line in the structure, the antihistorical element in History.”<sup>6</sup> Ethnographic cinema is a minor form, generated by minority content. It takes the autonomous thinking, feeling, moving minor body as its subject, thereby addressing (minoring, critiquing, etc.) not only the major ethnographic and cinematic institutions, but also the regimes of colonial power and the discourses of racial difference. In the ethnographic film image, those that were once omitted from history and separated from the West enter the frame. They share space and time with the camera, with the ethnographer, with the European/Western self. They participate in the construction of the film and the processes of subtraction, excision, and amputation that define both it and them. They resemble nothing of the mythologies that precede their presence (or absence) onscreen. Bodies mix and merge, mobilize and collapse, wander into and out of frame. These are not “whole people in whole acts,” but real bodies and minor energies. Fragments and parts. Vanishing points, on an ever-receding horizon.

Surely, there may be something unsettling about associating early ethnographic practice with minor forces or acinematic qualities. Whereas Bene was a playwright, actively minoring against major works, actively engaged in a process of cultural and political critique, early ethnographic cinema is a way of seeing and recording the world, undertaken by explorers and operators, anthropologists and scientists who were not looking to upset the status quo or challenge ethnographic institutions. They very often worked for them. This is a critical distinction, but one that ultimately misunderstands the differences between these minor forms. Admittedly, one cannot equate ethnographic films with the kind of conscious, self-reflexive minoration that Bene’s work embodies. They are different orders of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 254.

minor. However, what separates ethnographic cinema is not the oppressive force of ethnographic authorship circumscribing it. Rather, I would argue that one simply cannot ground these images in the mind of a unique creator or operator. Ethnographic cinema is ultimately an unauthored, authority-less form, constructed out of a manifold encounter between bodies and machines. Of course, this much could equally be said of other cinematic modes. And it is precisely the industrial, mechanical, and collective features of cinematic reproduction that eventually foment a demand for the cinema *d'auteur*. In the case of early ethnographic institutions, however, these qualities set ethnographic representation loose, challenging the order, authority, and control of its institutional predecessors. As cinema, ethnography leaves the fold. It enters a vibrating field of moving bodies and shaking frames, of free play and minor energies.

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